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Network of Women  
Philosophers

# WOMEN PHILOSOPHERS' JOURNAL



## squaring the circle

No. 1 / November 2011

# WOMEN PHILOSOPHERS' JOURNAL

**Journal of the International Network of Women Philosophers, sponsored by  
UNESCO**

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squaring the circle

No. 1 / November 2011

# Contents

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## Editorial

Barbara Cassin, Françoise Balibar, Françoise Collin <a href="#"><i>Squaring the circle</i></a> .....	6
---	---

## Sex Blind and Gender Aware

### What men philosophers think of women philosophers

Souleymane Bachir Diagne <a href="#"><i>What I have learned from my philosopher sisters about philosophy</i></a> .....	12
---	----

Ali Benmakhlouf <a href="#"><i>Who is man, who is woman? Certainty without criteria</i></a> .....	17
--	----

### What women philosophers think of men philosophers

Barbara Cassin <a href="#"><i>Genres and genders</i></a> <a href="#"><i>Woman / philosophy: identity as strategy</i></a> .....	25
--	----

Françoise Collin <a href="#"><i>A women philosophers' journal?</i></a> .....	38
---	----

Irma Julienne Angue Medoux <a href="#"><i>What might women philosophers think about what men think, whether philosophers or not?</i></a> <a href="#"><i>A politically incorrect view</i></a> .....	45
--	----

Brigitte Sitbon-Peillon <a href="#"><i>Philosopher-queens</i></a> .....	53
--	----

Monique David-Ménard <a href="#"><i>The universality of thought is an outcome: men believe it to be a principle</i></a> .....	58
--	----

## To speak about different things, we must speak differently

Justine Yoman Bindedou <a href="#"><i>Demand for a political identity for women: challenging domestication</i></a> .....	66
---	----

Hélène Xilakis <a href="#"><i>Abstraction: the defect of human rights?</i></a> .....	81
---	----

Francesca Brezzi <a href="#"><i>Philosophy as intercultural factor</i></a> .....	85
---	----

Giulia Sissa <a href="#"><i>A woman, a style of thinking. The craft of Nicole Loraux</i></a> .....	91
---	----

Alexandra Ahouandjinou <a href="#"><i>The obstacle and positive resistance to the obstacle</i></a> .....	109
---	-----

Susana Villavicencio <a href="#"><i>Political correctness and the independence of Latin American countries</i></a> .....	118
---	-----

Emilienne Baneth <a href="#"><i>Who is speaking and where from?</i></a> <a href="#"><i>The space between 'no woman's land' and political correctness</i></a> .....	123
--	-----

## Author and book reviews

Mara Montanaro <a href="#"><i>Performativity and vulnerability in the work of Judith Butler</i></a> .....	133
--	-----

Marie Garrau <a href="#"><i>Review of Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice</i></a> .....	140
---	-----

Sandra Laugier <a href="#"><i>Ethics of care: gender subversion</i></a> .....	142
--	-----

Françoise Balibar <a href="#"><i>Is the word 'feminism' still philosophically meaningful?</i></a> <a href="#"><i>Concerning the work of Donna Haraway</i></a> .....	152
---	-----

# Contents

---

## Speaking as...

<a href="#"><i>Interview with Françoise Gorog, psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, manager at Sainte-Anne Hospital, Paris</i></a> .....	<b>154</b>
--	------------

## Information

<a href="#">Websites, networks</a> .....	<b>165</b>
<a href="#">Conferences</a> .....	<b>168</b>
<a href="#">Advertisements</a> .....	<b>170</b>

## Events

<a href="#">Review</a> .....	<b>172</b>
<a href="#">Books published</a> .....	<b>174</b>
<a href="#">Collections</a> .....	<b>184</b>
<a href="#">Editions</a> .....	<b>185</b>
<a href="#">Journals</a> .....	<b>186</b>
<a href="#">Conference notes</a> .....	<b>188</b>
<a href="#">Conversation with Silvia Cavallieri (Donne Pensanti) by Martin Rueff</a> .....	<b>191</b>

## Authors

.....	<b>204</b>
-------	------------

### Squaring the circle

The *Women Philosophers' Journal* is published online within the framework the International Network of Women Philosophers, sponsored by UNESCO following a decision taken in December 2009 by the first assembly of the Network, which was established in 2007 on the initiative of the Philosophy Section.

The title of the journal is sufficient to define it: its subject matter is philosophy; its authors are women from all over the world. True, it is very simple, and yet so complex that this first issue should be entitled 'squaring the circle'.

Because a number of aporias arose as we got down to business:

- This is a philosophy journal, but not a philosophy journal in the usual sense of the term. It is not only philosophers who write for it – but then who else? Philosophy is not the only subject matter – but then what else? Contributions are not judged only according to academic criteria – but then what are the other criteria?
- It is a journal produced by women, but it is not a gender journal; its purpose is not to analyse the relations between the sexes (gender).<sup>1</sup> It is a journal produced by women, but not only women write for it; men are also invited to contribute.
- It is a global journal, but this issue is rather Franco-French. Somehow, despite our best efforts, it reflects the views of a rather small circle of 'us' – the very same 'we' who wrote this first editorial – a circle which we very much hope to broaden in the near future.

The source of these aporias is known, but that makes them no easier to resolve.

Given that philosophy is a cultural and historical product of the 'masculine Occident' ('phallogocentrism', Derrida called it), what is the relevance of an international philosophy network? Is there not a certain 'racism' in deciding to produce a philosophy journal?

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1. [See the article by Françoise Collin](#) in this Journal.

So how to avoid creating two blocks: the 'normal' West (where men and, at a push, women are recognized as philosophers) *versus* the rest of the world which cannot be interpreted using Western criteria and standards? How to judge that which escapes the Western 'universal' and do justice to it 'philosophically'? Who is to be judge?

On top of this come difficulties to do with language. There is a gulf between one's mother tongue and the language of scientific expression, and this causes huge comprehension problems between women philosophers from different regions. For the moment, although we ask for contributions to be submitted in 'original' languages, the journal appears basically in two languages, English and French. But the texts received are in several different types of French, which the 'received' French of France does not begin to cover, but whose correctness and indeed, readability it nevertheless defines. Who dares to rewrite, why, and how? There also needs to be reflection on possible differences between philosophers who use French and those who use English.

That the *Women Philosophers' Journal* has been created within an international institution which, ever since its inception, has striven to carve out forums for freedom wherever they are lacking, indicates that this is a similar kind of endeavour. The *Women Philosophers' Journal* aims to give women's thought a freedom and visibility which current cultural structures do not offer, or at least not in the right form. But, one might ask, cannot women, in particular women philosophers, express themselves as they wish in cultural journals that already exist? Nothing prevents them from doing so.

Nothing? Really?

For is not one of the effects of the universal on those who constructed the universal on the basis of their own identity and experience precisely that they are blinded to the fact that they are not the achievement of the universal? This blindness is supported by the apparent ease and visible pleasure with which, in some countries, a significant number of women achieve 'universal' thinking – that of men.

The *Women Philosophers' Journal* is based on the principle that there is nothing innocent about acting as though the gap between the universal and its achievement by men is reduced to nothing, or does not matter. Furthermore, it is not true that 'nothing' prevents women philosophers from engaging in the exercise of thinking. The journal is intended to be a forum for writing and exchange, where women may write as freely as possible, write imagining themselves being read by women, write free from the looming gaze of an imaginary, universal, male reader (even though readers of the journal will also be men). It is a kind of vast, global experiment, aimed at doing for women what men have enjoyed for centuries, sometimes achieved only after a hard-fought struggle, in religious institutions and richly endowed universities: to think and write without limitations, and to be read by open minds.

This global experiment would be impossible if the journal were not supported by UNESCO, which guarantees a 'universality' that no traditional journal has ever enjoyed. The contributions received come from all the continents. However, when reading some of these texts, we had the (disagreeable) impression that we lacked the means to decipher them, as though we were incapable of understanding what was being said. Not because these texts are an expression of another culture, but because the tools of philosophy, of 'our' philosophy, particularly the rhetorical tools, are handled in a way that perplexes us. Historically, philosophy is a European endeavour, elevated to the status of universal thought and disseminated throughout the world by means of gunboats, schools, Pasteur Institutes and hard labour. Fundamentally, the question the journal asks is whether this experiment will give rise to an alternative way of thinking. In other words: will the *Women Philosophers' Journal* be subversive or, quite simply, politically correct?

*The list of contents shows traces of all these matters which we wanted to address, by means of the topics proposed at the Network meetings.*

*The first Assembly, in 2009, chose to harness the reciprocal gaze in an attempt to define the phrase 'women philosopher' by examining the various forces and powers at play in different cultures. We put the question 'what do men philosophers think of women philosophers?' to a number of men philosophers chosen for their knowledge of different cultural areas, for their point of view: François Jullien for China, Charles Malamoud for India, Ali Benmakhlouf for the Arab world, Bachir Diagne for Africa, and Alain Badiou for*



## Editorial

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*Europe. Women philosophers have replied to these guest contributors, who did not always provide a written contribution. 'Sex Blind and Gender Aware' in this issue is, in part, the result of this.*

*During 2010 we received a great many highly diverse contributions. In order to interpret them, we were forced to tackle head-on the issue of women's power and political correctness and its various forms. At the 2010 meeting we directly raised the issue of the relation between Gender Studies and Postcolonial Studies, which arose at the same time on North American campuses, and sought to deconstruct the sudden proliferation of 'care' and 'difference'. This, in part, has led to the idea that 'To speak about different things, we must speak differently', enunciated in this issue.*

*The Journal also includes "Comments on Authors and Books", "Information" and "Events", as well as the videos made possible by the electronic format.*

*This first issue of the Journal has enjoyed the constant, firm and calm support of Moufida Goucha, Chief of the UNESCO Philosophy Section, as well as the assistance of the members of her team – especially Phinith Chanthalangsy, who managed to overcome the difficulties encountered along the way with good humour, irony and sensitivity.*

Barbara CASSIN  
Françoise BALIBAR  
Françoise COLLIN

# **Sex Blind and Gender Aware**

# **What men philosophers think of women philosophers**

## Souleymane Bachir DIAGNE

My two sisters and I – no doubt under the influence of our father, who was himself brought up in the tradition of an Islam of letters, which is both rationalist and mystical – have all taken up careers as philosophers, and have thus decided to spend our lives immersed in the same books that comprise that same intellectual tradition<sup>1</sup>.

However, is it really so natural that we should read the same books? Are we dealing in every respect with the same tradition? What exactly do my sisters read, as women, in some of the pages of the history of philosophy in which specific reference is made to women?

Let us take, for example, the words of Machiavelli, when he explains in *The Prince* why, although people are fickle and their affairs so often subject to the whims of Fortune, a science of governing human beings is nonetheless possible, the principles of which he proceeds to expound. For example, given their fickle nature, the Prince ought to inspire fear rather than love in his subjects, because although it is up to them to decide whether to love him today, but perhaps not tomorrow, it is entirely up to him to ensure that they live permanently in fear of what he is capable of doing. On Fortune, which is said to rule the affairs of the world, Machiavelli quotes, as a philosopher, the adage that 'Fortune smiles on the audacious', and tells his Prince that 'Fortune is a woman, and if you wish to control her it is necessary to beat and ill-use her. It is seen that she allows herself to be mastered by the adventurous rather than by those who go to work more coldly. She is, therefore, always, woman-like, a lover of young men, because they are less cautious, more violent, and with more audacity command her'.

To take a second, famous, example, Kant explains in his essay 'Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?' that it is not developing our reason that will help us to emerge from immaturity, but audacity. Once again: '*Sapere aude!* (Dare to be wise!) Have courage to use your own understanding.' When he states that the majority of people will always lack the audacity

1. My sister Rokhaya Diagne, having taught philosophy for over ten years, is currently working for the Senegalese Ministry of Gender and Equity Issues. My other sister Ramatoulaye Diagne, who is also a member of the International Network of Women Philosophers, directs the Doctoral School in the Literature and Human Sciences Faculty at Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar.

required to take the step forward to maturity, he mentions in passing that this includes 'the entire fair sex', whom he considers as naturally too lazy to dare.

When a woman philosopher reads such remarks, she is abruptly brought down from the elevated plane of concepts, where she thought that she was on an equal footing with men philosophers – communing mind-to-mind – to her identity as a woman, who the text suddenly presumes to address to say that it was somehow not written for her. Must we simply make do with these pages and these remarks? For example, when reading Machiavelli, should we simply pay scant attention to the comparison of Fortune to a woman or to the conclusion that both need to be bent to a man's will? In which case, we would only retain the 'concept', the essential philosophical idea, without bothering too much about the way it is expressed, focusing on what the comparison is aimed at saying rather than on what it actually says, which would be categorized as accidental, inessential, mere packaging. Above all, as the philosophical common sense of the (primarily male?) reader of *The Prince* would suggest, one should avoid letting over-sensitivity to what is said about women in general make one drop one's prey in order to pursue a chimera; in other words, drop the concept in favour of the comparison it conveys.

Is this possible? As the philosopher Catherine Malabou asks: How can we, without further ado, adopt wholesale the technical and symbolic protocols of a discourse and culture in which we have been, for centuries, a non-entity?<sup>2</sup> Let us put Catherine Malabou's question this way: can one simply gloss over Machiavelli's comparison as a mere 'accident' of his discourse, whose subject matter is highly serious, given that we have every reason to be sensitive to the issue of domestic violence, in particular against women? Especially when one is, like my sisters are, a philosopher and a modern, enlightened woman, aware of what interpretation means, and living in a society where some men think they can justify the violence they inflict on their wives with a literal reading of some Koranic verse taken out of the context which is an integral part of its completely different interpretation? It is true, incidentally, that domestic violence, and violence against women in general, exists everywhere, and does not require religious texts for its 'justification'. We are thus bound, and not only as women philosophers, to take Machiavelli to task when we come to what he says about Fortune; to take him to task about a discipline,

2. Interview published in *Nouvelle Revue Française*, April 2010, No. 593, p. 166.

philosophy, which in many respects is co-substantial with its own history, and until very recently has consisted almost exclusively of the thoughts of men, who are quite 'naturally' granted the authority to subjugate, where necessary by beating and battering, those who are other than the reason they themselves embody, namely women. And this is how Catherine Malabou answers her own question: A woman can be a "philosopher" only by going beyond, by skirting round, by surpassing philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

3. *Ibid.*

It is not only women here who are considered to be 'other than reason'. There are other 'Others', such as Aristotle's Barbarian (non-Greeks may be reduced to slavery, as they are not inhabited by the *logos*), the American Indian in the eyes of Sepulveda, who was Las Casas's adversary in the Valladolid debate, and the African, considered to be outside history by Hegel (and more recently by a certain president). This is precisely the lesson that I have learned from putting myself in the place of my sister philosophers (in general) when I come across passages like those just mentioned. I hardly need put myself in their place; I am already there, as an African philosopher. How often do we not come across texts by the most enlightened philosophers who, when they move from the 'metaphysics of mores' and considerations about man in general to the actual 'geography' of human populations, become simpletons chuckling to themselves as they report the concocted tales of travellers describing forms of humanity which are radically different from 'ours'. One might even say: 'An African may only be a "philosopher" by going beyond, skirting round and surpassing philosophy.'

So much for the lesson learned in connection with the history of philosophy, where apparently, as Machiavelli tells us, there is good reason to beat Fortune like a woman or like plaster. But what about the institution of philosophy today, and the places where it is practised, in other words, in particular, the places where it is taught?

Do men and women philosophers on university campuses, and more particularly in philosophy departments, live the same realities? In my attempt to answer this question, at least in part, I shall draw on my experience of the United States, where I have lived and worked for the past ten years. This is a country where people are not afraid to use statistics on ethnic origin or gender,

particularly where tools are needed to measure real-life situations in order to correct them if necessary. When I mentioned the assembly of the International Network of Women Philosophers to Christia Mercer, a colleague and friend in the Philosophy Department at Columbia University, she spoke to me at length about a similar meeting that had been held at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where women philosophers had gathered together to form the Women in Philosophy Task Force.

One of the first actions of the task force had been to establish methods for measuring, as precisely as possible, the problems encountered by women philosophers in philosophy departments, with the aim of circulating them among men and women philosophers who are adamant that things passed over in silence need to be highlighted in order to bring about the necessary change. The task force's longer-term mission is to reflect on what my colleague (who is the first woman philosopher to have been granted tenure in the Philosophy Department at Columbia) likes to call micro-inequalities. She defines this term as those little, almost imperceptible things which, in her opinion, are especially pernicious because far too many men philosophers truly think them about women philosophers without outwardly appearing to, and perhaps even unconsciously so. These micro-inequalities are like Leibniz's little perceptions: the little things that are everything and make a discernable difference.

One example of a micro-inequality which reflects what men philosophers think of women philosophers, and which constitutes, as it were, an objective measurement thereof, are letters of recommendation. In countries such as the United States, where recruitment and promotions at all levels depend crucially upon the normally well-thought-out judgements and arguments of peers in the form of letters of recommendation, these indispensable elements of any job application provide an objective basis from which to ascertain what men philosophers think about women philosophers. As they write what they think (and generally it is men who write these letters, given the demographic composition of philosophy departments), what do they say? Nothing that is systematically negative, of course, but it would appear that letters written about women philosophers are quite consistently shorter than those written about men

philosophers. The explanation for this, established by the above-mentioned task force, is that less time is spent on describing the academic achievements of women.

Lastly, I would like to point to another of these micro-inequalities, which can be seen in the fact that while philosophy departments are on the whole sparsely populated by women, there appear to be within the discipline itself subdivisions with gender-related specializations. Sally Haslanger, philosopher and linguist at MIT, has shown, in addition to figures indicating that between 2002 and 2006, of all the articles published on philosophy, 95.56% were written by men versus 4.44% by women, and attendance rates at philosophy symposiums and other discussion forums averaged 90.20% men and 9.80% women, that there is considerable structural pressure on women to follow career paths which, according to persistent stereotypes, reflect the views held about them, namely ethics, history of philosophy, and studies in feminist philosophy, while the fast track lies naturally, in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, in the fields of logic and analytical philosophy.

These brief observations on the institution of philosophy show that women, in general, are expected to (re)present experience, whereas men philosophers are meant to propound concepts. In order to understand and reject this, men philosophers may not necessarily need their sister philosophers in order to look at themselves in the mirror, but it certainly helps.



## Ali BENMAKHLOUF

An alternative version of my title is 'What can we be sure of, without being assured?' Certainty presupposes that there are hinges on which the doors of doubt can swing. These hinges are a form of life, not an abstraction. For Wittgenstein, questions of existence, of reference, are too elaborate to figure in the questions of doubt that may preoccupy us. Questions of doubt have no place in deliberations on the existence or not of the external world, on the existence or not of my hands, but they do take hold of me if, after I have been engaged in conversation with someone for several minutes, they suddenly say 'hello', starting the conversation all over again, or if they begin speaking with several other voices simultaneously. The form of life of which I am a part, the hinges of my certainty, are not subjects for abstraction of the 'this exists' kind. Alice feels completely at home with all the animals around her, without distinguishing herself from them – she is impregnated with them, and they with her. The sign of this impregnation is that they are all wet. The moment that she again becomes 'she' is when the Mouse says: 'Sit down, all of you, and listen to me! I'll soon make you dry enough.' The dreamlike situation is not just one of confusion between the sexes, but between realms. We do not know who is who; the blurring only begins when the narrative divides everyone into 'he' or 'she'. When the Caterpillar asks Alice who she is, she replies: 'I-I hardly know, sir, just at present – at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then ... I can't explain myself ... because I'm not myself, you see.' The narrative introduces doubt, through the difference between realms and sexes, it dries out life forms, even fixes the moving sculpture of a Daedalus or Pygmalion. 'We know things in dreams and are ignorant of them in reality', Montaigne has Plato say.

This blurring, where criteria are not established, where there is 'becoming-animal' as Deleuze and Guattari put it, as well as another 'becoming', where man sculpts himself into a woman and woman into a man. In which sense? In the sense that one starts to talk in the name of the other, becoming the other, to some extent. If we accept the idea of a continuity of existences, it would

be hard, for example, to say where a man stops and a woman begins. This can be seen clearly by traits that lead us to say that a man has something feminine about him, or a woman something masculine; that a man gains masculinity against a background of femininity, and a woman, femininity against a background of masculinity. That is what happens in the love between father and daughter, mother and son – Pygmalion passions, Montaigne tells us, in his essay on the affection of fathers for their children:

As for those wicked and furious passions that have sometimes made fathers lust for their daughters, or mothers for their sons, there are parallels to be found in this other kind of family relationship, as witness the tale that is told of Pygmalion, who, having made a statue of a woman of singular beauty, fell so desperately in love with his creation, that the gods, out of pity for his frenzy, imbued it with life. *Tentatum mollescit ebur, positoque rigore, subsidit digitis.* (The ivory grows soft under his touch and yields to his fingers. Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, x 283).<sup>1</sup>

1. Montaigne, *Essais* II, VIII, Paris, Flammarion, 2008, p. 402.

Both Daedalus and Pygmalion are involved with moving and transformed sculpture – the sculptures of Daedalus move around, while Pygmalion's sculpture is a woman made by a man, or indeed the man who becomes the woman he makes, like the father the daughter he loves or the mother the son she loves. This game is 'wicked' Montaigne tells us, in other words, dangerous, when the father makes his daughter the son she is not, or the mother makes her son the daughter he is not.

Alice no longer knows who she is, because she keeps changing size, but has a great deal to learn from the Caterpillar, who becomes a chrysalis then a butterfly. Above all, she has to learn to keep calm when things become what she thought they could not or should not be, or to remember the Queen's words, who, when Alice exclaims to her 'one can't believe impossible things!' replies, 'I dare say you haven't had much practice'.

Let us set aside this dreamlike, or artistic bias, albeit full of lessons for our subject, and turn to the *epos* of a culture, as it appears to us in a waking dream, with its unfathomable mystery.

It is the sacred texts, in this case the Koran, that invite us to pursue the exercise of rendering the impossible thinkable – not rendering it possible, but thinkable. The Sura Maryam (Mary) tells of the curse put on Mary by the tribe, as she returned carrying the baby Jesus, having given birth under the palm tree – a curse because she has had the child of an unknown father and which is a burden to the girl-mother, bringing scandal. It is the child, Jesus, the Pygmalion son, who will lift the curse. God tells Mary to say nothing but to show the baby to the people. They question her, and she silently points to the baby, who responds: 'I am indeed a servant of God... He hath enjoined on me prayer and charity as long as I live, He hath made me kind to my mother.' He replies in place of his mother, without having the ordinary use of language, because he responds without using the criteria of our speech. He is like a character from a legend. He does not describe, he prophesies.

Suddenly, the mother's honour is restored; for an instant the son becomes his mother, in order to respond on her behalf. He is the good news. And the expression has remained in everyday use to characterize good news: 'it's a boy?' We should also note that in Arabic, 'man' (*rajul*) and 'improvisation' (*irtajala*), share the same root – to improvise is to act like a man.

What happens to a woman who takes responsibility for her own salvation? She becomes a saint, a mystical woman, standing at the edge of the world calling to humankind, including men. There is a certain power in the Christian example of Christ as new man in whom, through holy perfection, there is neither female nor male, according to Saint Paul.<sup>2</sup> I would like to discuss two mystical women, Rābi'a *al-adawiyaa*, an Iraqi living in the eighth century, and Aisha *al-manoubbiya*, a Tunisian from the thirteenth century. Both women, who devoted their lives to God, lived on the edge of society, at the frontier – this was the price they paid for erasing the distinction between themselves and men, rather like Mary, the only woman named in the Koran and who is the great figure invoked by Muslim mystics.

In the thirteenth century, Ibn Arabi said 'there is no higher quality possessed by men, to which women do not equally have access'<sup>3</sup>, or, as Hassan al-Basri, a contemporary of Rābi'a

2. Cited by Evagrius Ponticus in the fourth century, in *Pensées*, Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998, p. 63 [in French].

wrote, 'so much was said about God that one no longer knew who was man and who was woman'.

Rābi'a was a *waliya*. People came to find her, to understand her rigorous practice of poverty. The relationship she wished to have with God was one of love, traversed by the fear of not being worthy:

My peace is in my solitude ...  
O Healer of the soul  
My hope is for union with Thee ...  
for that is the goal of my desire.

This attitude naturally presupposes a form of renunciation, *zuhd*, a means of 'letting go of the material, and the desire for it'.<sup>4</sup> For Rābi'a, the appeal for forgiveness has, itself, to be forgiven, because it is a selfish request: 'if we ask for forgiveness, we also have to be forgiven for the insincerity of our prayer' (*istighfârounâ yahtâjou il istghfârin li 'adami al sidqi fihi*<sup>5</sup>).

This means that the empirical or material ego, the gendered self, is held in abeyance, for it is the delineated self that the mystic wants to diminish as much as possible. The world is also presented not as a world whose workings we need to understand, but as a world that dazzles us each day, as it is the very fact of the world that is the mystery – the mystery in which the mystic dwells.

This is *hayra*, which, for philosophers, is a source of puzzlement, and, for mystics, a source of wonder. It is the fact of the world, not the 'how' of the world, that is a continual surprise for the mystic.

A Sufi like Rābi'a places herself immediately in the service of God, in other words without intermediary, without intercession, without someone who acts as go-between, but also immediately, now and for ever, in a time that does not pass, the time immemorial of memory, and not time with a before and after.

3. Nelly Amri, *Les saints en Islam, les messagers de l'espérance. Sainteté et eschatologie au Maghreb aux XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 2008, p. 19.

4. Abdallah al ansârî al harâwî, cité par Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch, *Anthologie du soufisme*, Paris, Sindbad, 1978, p. 89.

5. Rābi'a, *Chants de la recluse*, édition bilingue, Orbey, Arfuyen, 1988, p. 13.

Some, like Ibn Arabi, have even restored the image of Pharaoh through an alternative interpretation of the verse: 'I am your Lord, most high' (*anā rabbukumū al-a'lā*) – Pharaoh is pointing out that the divine attribute of sovereignty is within each of us, and he has been able to see it in himself. This is not to see oneself as God's equal, but to recognize God in oneself, as God is everywhere. As Rumi put it, 'God and saint become one', to such an extent that he cannot say where his self begins and ends; there is, then, no 'erasure of one's own identity' 'but rather the infinite passing into the loving embrace of the finite'<sup>6</sup>, yet which remains infinite.

These are *afrād*, solitaries, as the path to truth must be travelled alone. A *hadith* explains the stage of setting off: God's messenger says: Walk! The solitary shall arrive first! And they ask him: O messenger of God, who are the solitary?, and he replies: those who tremble at the very thought of God; the thought of God will lift their heavy load, so that they walk lightly on the day of the Resurrection.<sup>7</sup> They are already light, not because they have no extension, not so much because they seek to deny the weight of their own bodies, but because they strive to uncouple the link between their boundless, formal self, with its immense volition, and the material self.

*Majdouba*, enraptured by God or possessed, in a trance, in popular language, this is how people described Aisha *al-manoubiya*. There is always a mixture of respect and terror when in the presence of those who are enraptured. And it offers no protection from ridicule: Aisha was seen as 'a madwoman who approaches men and lets herself be approached by them, without having a husband herself.'<sup>8</sup> She is sometimes referred to as 'the Saint that creatures did not know', which means 'did not understand'. Like the imposing figure of Maryam, the only woman named in the Koran, who also was not understood, and through whom scandal arrives (*ma laki hādha; huwa min 'indi allak*).

I have now arrived at my third moment: the 'Philosophical Ego', which has already been prepared for by the previous two. The philosophical Ego experiences the kind of radical doubt that Alice's dream gives us an idea of – what if everything around us

6. Mohammed Iqbal, *Reconstruire la pensée religieuse*, French translation, Paris, 1955, pp. 80–81 and p. 120, cited by Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

7. Cited by Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

8. Nelly Amri, *op.cit.*, p. 70.

started to lose its familiar associations? We would realize that the world could have begun five minutes ago, and that the philosophical Ego is solipsistic, not in the sense that it reduces reality to its representation, and not according to an idealistic plan, but according to a pure form of realism which retracts the philosophical Ego into a single, dimensionless point, pure will, not an Ego that is 'human being, human body, human soul' which is the subject matter of psychology, but an Ego that is the boundary of the world, not part of the world, an ethical Ego which is like the eye that sees without being seen, or an opening onto the world without being part of it, an anchor point that enables one to consider the good life, or a work of art within a kind of eternity, an Ego that does not allow itself to be perceived in the world, an absolute subject in a way, a formal Ego, as Fichte would have put it. This formal Ego, this metaphysical subject is certainty without criteria, without criteria as it has no sexual, bodily or psychological delineation. The link with the material Ego, with the body, is purely contingent; it conditions nothing, speaks of nothing, it does not know how to speak, it is not discursive; it is on the frontier between language and the world. To see it, understand it, circumscribe it, one would have to straddle both sides of the border that it represents.

So what should we do? Recognize the utter heterogeneity of everything this world opens onto, and especially the radical contingency of everything that does not belong to this world. To be a man, starting with this Ego? Pure contingency. To be a woman starting with this Ego? Pure contingency. Hence the philosophical Ego can adopt the playful form of the absent-minded dreamer, the mystic relieved of the weight of the world. The dream gives an idea of the contingent links that bind this Ego to the rest; the mystic's prayer gives an idea of the contraction of this Ego to the point of non-extension. Dream, prayer, and discourse (in the sense of reasoning) are never enough for those who seek to grasp the philosophical Ego and who know that their match to the philosophical Ego will be all the greater, the more they are able to master the lyre to celebrate it or the trance to set it in motion.

The philosophical Ego is certainty without criteria, as we are not reassured by this Ego, given that it is the frontier. Uncertainty begins with the first forms of relationship with the material body, the gendered body. Uncertainty begins with that part of us which is part of the world – the body. But, as it is impossible for me to say what of my body is subject to my will and what of my body is not subject to my will, I have taken the liberty of speaking of the only certainty of interest to the metaphysician – the point with no extension of will, that is below consciousness, below the mask that constitutes the person. By exploring this frontier, it is not possible to say who is man and who is woman. Pygmalion leads us to explore the frontier via religion and mysticism; dreams lead us to explore the frontier through the state of weightlessness and the breaking of familiar bonds. My intention was to put these forward to indicate a possible point of view on the contingency that makes us men or women.

# **What women philosophers think of men philosophers**



## Barbara CASSIN

### What differences?

I should like to thank UNESCO, not only because this network for women philosophers was its brainchild but also because it has given the network a home, including a virtual one, a website, tools, financial support, its own Who's Who and a journal, which we ourselves will need to bring to life.

To thank UNESCO in my own way, as a philosopher and philologist, I will return to the words the acronym stands for and define them. The mission of UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, is 'to construct peace in the minds of men'; and it defines peace as 'the determination to act in a way that is based on respect for difference and for dialogue'. This is the heart of the matter: respect for difference. In creating a network of women philosophers, are we respecting difference? And if the answer is 'yes', what difference are we trying to respect? We are probably not trying to respect the man / woman difference – or if we are, not as such and not as it is usually understood; and probably not the philosopher / non-philosopher difference either – or again, not as such and not as it is usually understood. This is because we question these differences, stand them on their heads, deconstruct and reconstruct them. What differences, then, are we seeking to respect? Which ones do we want take back to the drawing board, the better to construct peace in the minds of men? How should we go about it?

Moufida Goucha, Chief of Philosophy and Democracy Section of UNESCO, sees us as women of influence, and this is how I see us, too, especially in contrast to women of power. But what do we want to influence? What, precisely, do we want to change? This is a key question.

1. The original title, '*La perméabilité des genres*', plays on the ambiguity of *genre* in French, which means both 'genre' and 'gender' [translator's note].

### Local and global – identity as a counter-reply

It seems to me that this question can be answered on two different levels: on one level, the answer is a general, global one that has to do with the relationship between men, women and philosophy; on the other level, the answer, or rather answers, are more localized in nature, and are connected with the status of women as a class and the status of women in a particular country, under a particular regime and in a particular culture. We need to coordinate these two levels, use each to support the other and join them up, in order to make them more effective. And since 'we' are 'philosophers' I want to try to join them up conceptually.

I think I know, roughly, what a concept is, or at least what it means to talk-and-think (the old, Greek *logos*). But I am not at all certain that I know what the predicate 'philosopher' means (hence the inverted commas), nor am I at all certain what is meant when I use, or when someone else uses, the word 'woman'. And finally, I know least of all whether the male-female distinction is relevant to philosophy, and if it is, to what extent and at what juncture. This is what we, Hourya Benis, Geneviève Fraisse and myself, have tried to emphasize from the beginning of this venture in 'Fundamental problems, founding problems'<sup>2</sup>, especially with the provocative question: 'Can a man be a woman philosopher?' This question has prompted the theme of our first symposium: 'What do men philosophers think of women philosophers?' The first issue of the *Women Philosophers' Journal* reflects this very preoccupation, as it reproduces two replies by two men.<sup>3</sup> As I see it, the elements of provocation and irony contained in this question are as much a necessity as a luxury. In fact, I think it is only by using provocation and irony that we should, or even can, take pleasure in what we are doing. Men / women / philosophers: what does this mean, locally and generally?

Let us start with the local level, which under no circumstances should be put to one side. Although I may not know what it is to be a woman philosopher, I do know that being a woman philosopher in Afghanistan is not the same thing as being a woman philosopher in the Islamic Republic of Iran, or Senegal (we learn about this from Tanella Boni), or China,

2. See the 'Philosophical Tribune' in the preliminary issue of this journal, n° 0, pp. 5–6.

3. All the conference papers were on this theme, but covering different areas of culture and civilization. In the end, only two 'men philosophers' submitted their papers for this first issue. But the fact that this first number of a journal for women philosophers opens with a contribution from a man generated a great deal of discussion, and the idea of creating a balance with something like: 'What do women philosophers think of men philosophers, or think of what men philosophers think of them', seemed to be called for, if only for emotional reasons.

or France (a subject Catherine Malabou has recently written about)<sup>4</sup>, or the United States... Sometimes because it is not the same thing being a woman, sometimes because it is not the same thing being a philosopher (always assuming that the word 'philosophy' has a meaning – like François Jullien, we may well wonder, for instance, whether it has any meaning in China); at other times still, because the overlap between these two categories is not the same or perhaps because there is no overlap at all. It is not the same thing to be denied the right to go to school, to start by studying the history of philosophy when one studies philosophy, to be in a university that has a department of gender studies and where the history of philosophy comes under comparative literature. At this level, the Network is fundamental: we must use it to create an identity as a counter-reply, an identity based on all the other 'woman-philosopher' entities throughout the world, not to standardize things or to construct a model, but as a point of reference, a defence, a support and as a way of achieving strength through unity. I want to emphasize that the identity of woman philosopher is primarily a strategic one, designed for a particular purpose and as a means of resistance, an identity that has much in common with 'affirmative action', which is tied to a particular situation, to a set of circumstances specific to a given time and place. This is the sense in which we can say: we are all women philosophers, even if we do not know what this means.

### The 'best for' notion of relativism: a strategic universal

I now want to explore more deeply this identity we have created as a counter-reply, for a particular opportunity and as a form of resistance, by linking it to the values of relativism. What is relativism? It is not the rejection of values, nor is it the idea that everything is of equal worth, but rather the rejection of values that will remain exactly and eternally the same, for all places and for all times. Since the time of Plato and throughout the entire history of philosophy, the maxim of Protagoras is emblematic of the relativist position. 'Man is the measure of all things' [*pantôn khrêmatôn anthrôpos metron*]: probably, more has been written about this little sentence than any other. When Plato's Socrates recalls this maxim in the *Theaetetus*, a dialogue 'on science', he suggests an alternative version: 'a pig or a baboon is the measure of all things'. He immediately

4. See, in [n° 0](#), p. 9, on books by T. Boni, *Que vivent les femmes d'Afrique?* [What are the Women of Africa Living Through?] and C. Malabou, *Changer de différence. Le féminin et la question philosophique* [Changing Difference. The Feminine and the Question of Philosophy].

regrets saying it and thinks: 'Protagoras would have said to me, "Are you not ashamed of yourself, Socrates?"' And so he presents 'Protagoras's apology'<sup>5</sup>, allowing Protagoras to speak through him, as if he were there in person to mount his own defence. Protagoras changes the parameters, quite radically: he switches from the binary opposition between true and false to the comparative 'better'. We learn that there is no such thing as Truth with a capital 'T', the Platonic idea that allows the philosopher-king to reign supreme over all men (and women, too, for sure), but rather that some things are 'truer' than others. There is no absolute, only a comparative; and, more specifically still, what I would call a 'dedicated comparative': the 'truer' is a 'better for'; as the better is defined as 'the more useful', the better adapted to (the person, the situation, all that makes up the moment in question, the moment the Greeks call *kairos*, 'the opportune moment'). This brings us back to the precise meaning of the *chrēmata* of which man is said to be the measure, not 'things' which are and are 'there' as beings, substances, essences or ideas, but things we make use of, *chrēmata*, objects which serve a purpose, which are there to be used and used up, 'riches', which obviously include language and linguistic behaviour.

This dedicated comparative, which takes into account the individual in context, defines, for me, the mission of culture and politics, not a politics that is good in absolute terms but a cultural politics that is 'better'. This better cultural politics does not consist in imposing the truth universally or imposing universal truth. It consists in helping people to choose what is best for them in their particular circumstances, and this, to my mind, is what a culture of peace is: helping people to choose what is best for them in their particular circumstances. To put it another way, for me as a woman philosopher, the universal is a strategy rather than a value per se, definitive and ultimate; or yet another way, the best universal is complex, many-sided and relative. Its nature is such that we rely on truth conceived as universal the better to resist, and I would even argue that we only rely on the universal the better to resist. This is how I make the transition from the local to the global level: I only rely on the universal the better to resist.

5. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 166–167: 'What we have to do is to make a change from the one to the other, because the other state is better. In education, too, what we have to do is to change a worse state into a better state; only whereas the doctor brings about the change by the use of drugs, the professional teacher does it by the use of words. What never happens is that a man who judges what is false is made to judge what is true ... But giving him a sound state of the soul causes him to think different things, things that are good. In the latter event, the things which appear to him are what some people, who are still at a primitive stage, call "true"; my position, however, is that the one kind are better than the others, but in no way truer... I look for wisdom, my dear Socrates, as regards animal bodies, in doctors; as regards plant-life, in gardeners – for I am quite prepared to maintain that gardeners too, when they find a plant sickly, proceed by causing it to have good and healthy perceptions, instead of bad ones. Similarly, the wise and efficient politician is the man who makes wholesome things seem just to a city instead of pernicious ones. ... In this way, we are enabled to hold both that some men are wiser than others, and also that no man judges what is false. And you, too, whether you like it or not, must put up with being a "measure"' (translated by M. Levett and revised by Myles Burnyeat, Hackett Pub. Co., Indianapolis, 1990).

### The philosophical universal crossed by genre and gender

And so we come to the general level, to the concept of ‘woman philosopher’ tout court, per se. What does it mean for the True, the Beautiful and the Good to be crossed by the difference of genre, and gender? What relevance does this have, and what effect?

I shall refer to the ‘Events’ section in our issue No. 0, specifically the ‘Elles’ exhibition at the Pompidou Centre, [elles@centrepompidou](mailto:elles@centrepompidou), which opened in May 2009 and was extended until February 2011.<sup>6</sup> It was a remarkable exhibition, for which its organizer, Camille Morineau, the Centre’s curator, has chosen only works by women artists that are part of the Centre’s own collection. In the exhibition catalogue, she begins her introduction with the question used by the American art historian Linda Nochlin as the provocative title (like irony, provocation is also a weapon) of the essay she wrote in 1970, ‘Why have there been no great women artists?’, one of the foundational texts of feminist critical theory in art.<sup>7</sup> You immediately hear ‘Why have there been no great women philosophers?’ Obviously, the answer depends in part on how the question is asked: there are no great women artists / great women philosophers because, historically, women have never enjoyed the conditions needed for producing, presenting and promoting their work; and this is clearly still the case today at a local level, if not generally. But that said, how do we move on?

Let me quote what Camille Morineau says: ‘The main criterion for the choice of the exhibited works of art [only works by women artists in the Pompidou Centre’s collection] is intended to remain in the background. The Museum is exhibiting exclusively women and yet the objective is neither to demonstrate the existence of a feminine art, nor to produce a feminist object. The objective is to lead the audience to consider this exhibition as a lovely history of twentieth-century art.’<sup>8</sup> In other words, the universal has to be reinforced by difference, the same universal, with or without women, with or without difference.

I am not certain this is true of art, and both the catalogue and the exhibition itself make important qualifications to this view, but in any event I do not think it is true of philosophy.

6. The women philosophers were invited and a visit was planned but had to be called off because of strike action. Virtual visits are possible.

7. Exhibition catalogue, *elles@centrepompidou: an appeal to difference*, p. 15. Check out the interview made in front of selected artworks of the exhibition: <http://www.centrepompidou.fr/videos/2010/20100908-barbaracassin/index.html>

8. *Ibidem*, p. 16.

The universal in philosophy, or what passes for such, does not emerge unscathed from gender difference. It is not simply modernized or dusted down, 'twentieth-centuried'. Even if we accept that the paintings in *'Elles'* resemble a wonderful history of twentieth-century art, I do not think that the publications by *'elles'* (women philosophers) add up to something resembling a good history of contemporary philosophy, but to something that would be much more akin to another ((hi)story of, (hi)story for or (hi)story involving) philosophy.

Here are a few obvious areas in which gender difference has impacted on the philosophical universal. I would like to arrange them in order, as Gorgias taught me to do in his treatise *On Nature or the Non-Being*:

- (1) historically speaking, there are no philosopher-women (from Hypatia to Hannah Arendt, their numbers in the history of philosophy are negligible), compared with the number of philosophers, i.e. philosopher-men.
- (2) but, secondly, if there are, those there are, if we focus on them today, here and now, make the history of philosophy read differently.

As far as Western philosophy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is concerned, I shall take just a few examples. When Monique David-Ménard writes about madness and pure reason in Kant, we read Kant through new eyes. When Catherine Malabou talks about plasticity in Hegel, we read Hegel through new eyes; and I hope that through my work on sophistic logology, we read the Greeks themselves (the basis for the history of contemporary philosophy for Heidegger, for example) through new eyes. We could say that *'they / elles'* focus on marginal objects and bring them from the margin towards the centre, objects that are problem objects, unsettling, not only for our perception of history but also for our perception of concepts.

Let me quote Catherine Malabou: 'It may be true that women do not invent any philosophical question, but they create problems. Wherever they can, they put a spoke in the wheel of

philosophers and philosophical systems. Thereby, the impossibility of being a woman becomes the impossibility of philosophy itself.<sup>9</sup> What we are to understand by the 'impossibility of being a woman' is the 'philosophical impossibility of being a woman philosopher', linked to the rejection of a female essence, to a refusal to be naturalized.

### The permeability of genres / genders

For my part, I should like to offer a few comments on this displacement of impossibility, and not simply register it.

So let me start with the comments. The impossibility – is it, in any case, the impossibility of being a woman tout court or already that of being a woman philosopher?<sup>10</sup> – becomes the impossibility of philosophy first and foremost in the sense that it 'loosens up' philosophy, makes it a more fluid concept; it turns it into something which, in itself, no longer has an essence, no longer can have an essence. This is what I call in French the '*perméabilité des genres*', the 'permeability of genres / genders'.<sup>11</sup> Philosophy as practised by women is decompartmentalized. Women philosophers decompartmentalize genres (this is precisely what sophistry does, too, in its own way, which is something I will come back to).<sup>12</sup> It will no longer be said that 'literature is for women, philosophy for men', and it will be said, though I hope less categorically, that 'this is literature, that is philosophy'. I will tell you a little story, if I may, which will explain why I immediately joined this Network of Women Philosophers when I was approached by Moufida Goucha.

While looking for a publisher for *L'Effet sophistique*, which is a book of 'pure philosophy' (in the way that we talk of 'pure science'), about Greek philosophy in its relation to the contemporary world, I tried, at the same time, to publish a collection of short stories that, to my mind, said exactly the same thing. They were stories about what can be done with words and even about 'how to do things with words', to borrow the title of Austin's book. For me, this is what Greek philosophy and sophistic logology are about, just as this is what our own lives are about at many points. For the title of the collection, I used a sentence

9. *Changer de différence. Les femmes et la philosophie*, Paris, Galilée, 2009, p. 128.

10. As for the impossibility of being a woman, I would find it difficult not to refer to Lacan's 'There is no sexual relationship' (see *Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel. Deux leçons sur 'L'Étourdit' de Lacan*, A. Badiou and B. Cassin, Paris, Fayard, 2010).

11. '*Perméabilité des genres*' is to be taken in all its senses, and we see in '[Fundamental problems, founding problems](#)' how they interrelate: 'a man can be a woman philosopher' (gender), 'we are not precluding universal reporting or conversation' (genre).

12. Here is the conclusion of *L'Effet sophistique* (Paris, Gallimard, 1995): '... to consider as our primary world not nature but culture, the world as product. In a posthumous fragment of 1888, Nietzsche also writes this: "Parmenides said: 'we cannot think of what does not exist' – we are at the other extreme and say: 'what can be thought of must certainly be a fiction.'" I would sum up all of this with: the demystification of the ontological act of giving decompartmentalizes the genres of the *logos*.'

that Gorgias applies to *logos*, to discourse: 'With the smallest and most invisible of bodies.' But I found it completely impossible to get both books published together, because every publisher rejected it, rejected the idea that a woman philosopher, who was already finding it difficult enough to be recognized as a philosopher, should dare to publish simultaneously a collection of short stories, in other words, to mix different genres, philosophy and literature. But it seems to me it is this mixing and this permeability of genres, more than anything else, that constitute 'our territory'.

That is why it seemed to me imperative, and symbolic, to ask Giulia Sissa to speak to us about Nicole Loraux. Nicole Loraux is a historian; as a woman historian, she is a woman philosopher. In other words, our relationship to our discipline and our relationship to our social identity are blurred, and this Network can and should make them even more so. When we launched our Who's Who, we were immediately contacted by women who, although not professional philosophers, were 'women philosophers', that is to say who wished to be involved in philosophy or saw themselves in that light. If there is no female essence, and if there is no 'woman philosopher' essence either, then it is normal for a woman hydrologist to be admitted to our Network of Women Philosophers. Or is it 'normal', since it creates a new norm? My answer would be 'yes', but we shall no doubt go on debating it, and for some time yet.

What is in question here is the Network's scope: to what extent can one be involved philosophically without being a professional philosopher? Basically, this question is related to the one we asked earlier: can a man philosopher belong to a network of women philosophers? Can a man be a woman philosopher? The way I see it, since my answer would be 'yes', is that this would be to approach the permeability of genres from another angle, that of gender.

*'Ne pas vaincre, con ou pas': the Græcia capta model*

So: the permeability of genres / genders in every sense of the expression. The Network of Women Philosophers implies that we do not relate to the universal, to essence,



to genre / gender in quite the same way: all this, I think, adds up to the fact that we do not relate to being controlled in quite the same way. Control, as I see it – through the eyes of a woman philosopher (let me say it once again, as far as I am capable of knowing what that means) – is not a value as such. At this point, I should like to draw on the words of Jacques Lacan, a man, a psychoanalyst (can a psychoanalyst be a woman philosopher? Quite probably, yes). This is what he says: ‘What is proper to psychoanalysis is not to vanquish (*vaincre*), whether by strength of conviction or not’ or ‘regardless of whether people are [idiots] (*con*) or not’<sup>13</sup>, it is not a matter of vanquishing (*vaincre*), or even of convincing (*convaincre*). I do not think it is any more a case of vanquishing for women philosophers either, or of convincing: as with psychoanalysis in relation to current discourse, we need, instead, to find a different model.

Our role is not to vanquish, but to change the model I, for one, have been prepared to live by, basically, for a very long time, and which I would sum up with a quotation from Horace, concerning Greece and Rome: *Græcia capta ferum victorem cepit* (captured Greece captivated the ferocious victor)<sup>14</sup>. *Græcia capta* – listen to all those ‘a’s – is quite unmistakably female and the Roman Empire, *ferum victorem*, male. It seems to me that for a long time women have thought, in accordance with this model, that they need only vanquish – and even that they would always succeed in vanquishing. Vanquish by being vanquished and by captivating their conqueror, as if their handsome victory – ever guileful and beguiling, never dialectical – depended on their own submission, but transcended it as well. For my own part, I am far less sure about all this today, and not only because an age-old ideology is at work, one that justifies conquests of the worst kind. I would prefer to believe that we do not have to vanquish at all; that we must really adopt a different model and put a stop to war altogether – or, to return to the UNESCO theme, that we can construct peace by other means than war.

13. *Encore. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XX*. Lacan plays on the word ‘*vaincre*’ (vanquish, L. *vincere*) and ‘*convaincre*’ (‘convince’, L. *convincere*), by separating the preverb *con* (L. *cum*), a signifier that designates in French the female genitals, and is currently used as meaning ‘an idiot’, ‘a jerk’. Bruce Fink translates (New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1999): ‘What is proper to psychoanalysis is not to vanquish (*vaincre*), regardless of whether people are [idiots] (*con*) or not.’

14. *Epistles*, 2, 1, 156. The line continues: *et artis intulit agresti Latium* (and brought the arts into rustic Latium): it is through the cultivation of the soul and politeness that the female makes the naturally rustic and boorish male more mellow, whence so many (aptly named?) ‘common’-places.

### Possible areas of influence

I should like to end with two kinds of conclusions, albeit tentative ones.

The first are suggestions for action of a practical nature. The second are observations addressed to myself, as a woman philosopher, and which bring us back to the relationship between the impossibility of being a woman and the impossibility of philosophy.

The practical forms of action I want to suggest cast us in the role of women who wield influence rather than power – it remains to be seen whether this lays to rest the *Græcia capta* model ... I should like the Network of Women Philosophers, on the strength of its UNESCO connection, to have within its ranks accredited observers and that they should be accredited, like journalists for example, in their capacity as women philosophers. They should be recognized by the courts, for instance, particularly by special courts such as International Criminal Tribunals (ICTs) and Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. Hannah Arendt, as a journalist/philosopher covering the Eichmann trial, described herself, not as a ‘woman philosopher’ but as a ‘Jewish individual *femini generis*’. I would like women philosophers to be accredited as ‘philosopher’ individuals *femini generis*. I once had the experience of serving on a jury in a French court of law; and what I saw there, significantly, was women – women judges, women barristers and women prosecutors – all of them white, judging men who were either black or of North African descent; this was true in about 80 per cent of cases. It seems to me that a woman philosopher who witnessed and reflected on what she saw would be as useful as Hannah Arendt as a Jewish woman at the Eichmann trial. We must use to full advantage the fact that we are women philosophers, both with and against a certain kind of feminine domination, and against a certain kind of masculine domination. I would also like us to be philosopher-observers *femini generis* in the world of economics. I cannot help feeling that had there been a woman-philosopher observer at the meeting, a few months ago, of women heads of the world’s biggest companies, we would have learned a few things and taught a few others.

In short, we must use our position as women philosophers to give a new direction to the increasingly important role of women.

A second possible area of influence would involve looking at the connection between language and philosophy. I have done a lot of work in this area myself, through the *Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*. I feel that, as philosophers, we have the opportunity, and probably the duty, to work on cultural diversity from the languages end. This would mean, on a country-by-country basis and on a very practical level, giving priority to translations and bilingual editions of the major 'philosophical' works – philosophical in the wider sense implied by the permeability of genres – the foundational texts of language-and-thought, so that these particular works are available to each and every one of us, in what Derrida referred to as 'more than one language', thus defining 'deconstruction' in quite a rude way.<sup>15</sup>

15. *Mémoires pour Paul de Man* [Memoires for Paul de Man], Paris, Galilée, 1988, p. 38.

But why, it may be asked, is this influence the prerogative of women philosophers rather than of philosophy in general? Or rather than the result of a more random experience or attraction on the part of an individual?

### 'As a philosopher' / 'As a woman'

As a reply, I would like to draw a little more on my own experience and investigate further the relationship between the impossibility of being a woman and the impossibility of philosophy.

Let me spend a few moments, if I may, on the little book I recently co-authored with Alain Badiou after twenty years of collaborative projects and of friendship. The book is called *Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel. Deux leçons sur 'L'Etourdit' de Lacan*. A sentence in the jointly written introduction reads: 'So that with respect to Lacan's *L'Etourdit...*, the philosopher at least will be able to say that we are witnessing a new confrontation, or a new division, between the masculinity of Plato and the femininity of sophistry'. This sentence should be segmented as follows: 'the masculinity of Plato'

(elsewhere: 'speculative masculinity') and 'the femininity of sophistry' (elsewhere: 'critical and performative femininity') are two phrases that a philosopher-man would write, and they were, indeed, written by Badiou. 'The philosopher at least will be able to say' is a discourse marker added by myself.

It takes account of the fact that a philosopher-man thinks that the philosopher, that is to say the man, is Plato. Certainly, I recognize myself in sophistry, its critical approach, its attention to language, performance and performativity. But the point is this: am I doing so as a woman or as a philosopher? Are we really dealing with sophistic 'femininity', or with sophistry as a modification of the philosophical universal? When I am working on sophistry, its relationship to language, criticism and performance, should I look upon what I am doing as the work of a woman or as the work of a philosopher?

But that is just it; I neither want to nor am able to answer such a question put to me in those terms. Or rather, I only want to reply to it in the following way: when someone says to me (that someone being a philosopher-man), 'you are speaking as a woman, from a female standpoint', I shall reply 'no, I am speaking as a philosopher'. The fact of the matter is that I am not interested in linguistic performance and in its destabilization of the universal, truth and fact because I am a woman, but because I am a philosopher. But when someone says to me, 'you are speaking as a philosopher', I shall reply 'no, I am speaking as a woman'. It is from a woman's position that I am interested in 'play[ing] old Harry with the true false fetish and the value fact one'<sup>16</sup>, as the philosopher Austin says and does (a man, by the way). It is my way of refusing to be assigned an essence: the only attribution I accept is that of resistance. It is with this 'Yes, but not like that' that I try to complicate the universal using the difference between genres and genders as well.

I shall now come back to the impossibilities that Catherine Malabou refers to. Women 'put a spoke in the wheel of philosophers and philosophical systems' and 'the impossibility of being a woman' becomes 'the impossibility of philosophy'. If we do not get past that

16. J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 2nd edn, 1975, Oxford U.P., p. 150.

point, I fear that there is nothing easier or more convenient for 'philosophy' than to manage the man / woman difference by applying it to the philosophy / antiphilosophy difference. This is precisely the Platonic operation effected by Badiou as a man philosopher. 'Those who subscribe to antiphilosophy, like Wittgenstein, Lacan and, ultimately, under the label "sophistry", Barbara Cassin, are only issuing a challenge to philosophy, the unusual challenge involving a new object, which, they claim, will strip philosophy of its old pretensions, because philosophy has either "forgotten" or refused to examine it.'<sup>17</sup> Throwing sophistry in the face of a latter-day Plato, bringing an object from the margin towards the centre are of no interest, apart from reinforcing the centrality of the centre and reviving the Universal and Truth by criticizing them, which would be totally counter-productive for a woman philosopher. Badiou's Platonic strength as a man philosopher consists in putting in sequence: sophistry (or any other blunt instrument)-woman-antiphilosophy (and straight away it is as clear as daylight that a certain number of men philosophers are actually women philosophers – Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and, of course, Derrida), and women can make waves, stick in their oars (and their spokes), for all they are worth, it will be to no avail. And yet, if a spoke should be put into the wheels of any machine, then it is surely this particular juggernaut. This is precisely what the change of attribution (as a woman/no: as a philosopher/no: as a woman) is strategically undermining, or at least seeking to undermine.

An identity based on resistance and not on essence. Does philosophy become impossible as a result, or transformed? If the answer is 'transformed', and this is what my own answer would be, then I cannot go along with Catherine Malabou's conclusion that '... I am absolute, isolated, absolutely isolated. I traverse the space of philosophy in absolute solitude.'<sup>18</sup> Instead, my message would be: philosophy not dead, but universal badly shaken. Deep in no-woman's-land, a unique network of women philosophers is growing. As Isabelle Stengers and Vinciane Despret put it, 'the awkward squad'...<sup>19</sup>

17. *Deux leçons, op. cit.*, p. 106.

18. This is the last paragraph of Catherine Malabou's book.

19. The French expression 'les faiseuses d'histoires' is the title of their book, *Les Faiseuses d'histoires. Que font les femmes à la pensée?*, Paris, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond/La Découverte, 2011. The expression plays on more than one meaning: 'faire des histoires' is familiar for 'to make a fuss', but also something like 'to tell stories', and, then, 'to make history' [translator's note].

## Françoise COLLIN

The idea of starting up an international women philosophers' journal in UNESCO, an initiative taken by Moufida Goucha, is a provocative one, to say the least. It provides a visible space within this great international institution for women's thought (the thinking of the women philosophers in question) without prejudice to the specificity or otherwise of such thinking.

One might wonder whether an initiative of this kind can be justified: is truth contingent on gender, as the journal would seem to be saying? The question should however be asked first of philosophy and its history, as from the Greeks to the present day it is wholly and uniformly masculine, as are religions.<sup>1</sup>

### Gender journals. Women philosophers' journal

As everyone knows, there are already various national and international associations of women philosophers, some producing publications and others not. But creating a 'women philosophers' journal' in an international institution such as UNESCO is no trifling matter. It is even a quietly subversive gesture. It is also a complex, polysemic one, which warrants analysis, as it is not a 'gender studies journal' of the sort to be found today in a large number of universities and research centres, not only in Western countries but further afield. A 'women philosophers' journal' is defined not by its subject – relations between the sexes or gender – but by its authors. It gives women room to express what they think on whatever subject they choose. A space where they can, what is more, invite certain men to express themselves in response to questions asked of them, thus inverting the usual arrangement.

1. I am especially touched by this initiative as that is the spirit in which in 1992 I designed an edition of the journal *Les Cahiers du Griffon* entitled 'Provenances de la pensée' [Where thought comes from], an issue with texts by contemporary women philosophers who were able to express themselves without having to consider themselves feminists, discuss 'gender' or even think 'as women'.

Gender studies and the journals that expound upon them are devoted to the analysis, from different perspectives, of relations between the sexes – ‘social relations between the sexes’. We know how in France the term *genre*, a rough translation of the word ‘gender’, emerged from 1980–1985 onwards to describe what were initially called ‘feminist studies’ (terminology that was too political to be able to claim scientific neutrality and gain access to the dignity of the Institution). The term *genre* however has the drawback of covering and concealing the dissymmetry and more specifically the hierarchy – not just difference – which governs relations between sexes, a hierarchy whose observance was precisely the trigger for the action and reflection of the feminist movement. In much the same way, ‘multiculturalism’ masks the hierarchical, not to say colonial relations between cultures. If Marx were alive today, would he have talked about ‘social relations between the classes’ instead of ‘the class struggle’?

Although gender studies started in insurrection, they have now acquired institutional status and are a vector of power. They are, moreover, increasingly often practised (and even directed) by men, as borne out by numerous seminars and journals, editorial collections and publications, both national and international. This trend may be explained as an extension or reappropriation of their subversive force.

A ‘women philosophers’ journal’, though, has a different purpose, as it is not defined by its subject – relations between the sexes or gender – but by its authors. Its title even reminds us that, in terms of philosophy, the hierarchical duality of the sexes as objects of enunciation is still current. It gives thinking women a space for expression without predetermining the subject, and it does so in a field from which for ages they were the most absent – not to say excluded – and where they still appear mostly as commentators, disciples or interlocutors rather than as creators: philosophy.

2. As attested by a rereading of philosophical texts from this point of view: see *Les femmes, de Platon à Derrida* [Women, from Plato to Derrida], texts collected and commented upon by F. Collin, E. Pisier, E. Varikas, Paris, Plon, 1999, reissued Paris, Dalloz, 2011.

For philosophy, from its Greek origins until the twentieth century, shares with religion the mono-sexed nature of its ministers and prophets and shows a surprising misogyny.<sup>2</sup> Faith and Reason which control the realm of 'truth' indeed have that in common over and above their differences. And although no-one would consider starting a 'men philosophers' journal', that is only because it would be a pleonasm. We could ask, though, whether talking about 'women philosophers' is not an admission of weakness in some way, and whether it might put off some women who would rather describe themselves simply as 'philosophers', even if that means remaining minor in the mixed world, as disciples, commentators or interlocutors of men philosophers, selected and approved by the men. Identifying oneself as a 'woman philosopher' is not only a statement of fact, it is also an act. And it is an act that can provoke, which has provoked among (men) philosophers a certain surprise, if not a certain unease, because, surely, philosophy has convinced itself for centuries that it is a place for the enunciation of a transcendent Subject, consequently indifferent to its empirical characteristics, even if these are quite obvious when we look back at the history of philosophy.

### Philosophy and phallogentrism

Do women have a specific position within philosophy – when they gain access to it? Do they have another approach to reality, or even a different relation to Being to men, whether for historical or ontological reasons? This question remains open, because allowing women philosophers to speak means taking a factual decision that might appear to be political: it does not mean predetermining the specificity or not of their opinions or their motivation, but making a space for expression and debate available to them.

The claim that philosophical thinking is 'universal' has moreover never prevented the fact that it emerges from particular contexts, both nebulous and formulated, be they historical, national or linguistic. We talk about English, German and French philosophy and the philosophy of the middle ages or the eighteenth century, without making that philosophy



so particular as to remove its capacity for truth. The universal always takes a contingent form: the Word is made flesh. It is possible to give philosophy different forms – sexed, national or historical, without deciding in advance the impact that sexuation, culture or history can have on it, and without for all that devaluing what it has to say. Descartes is not only a man, French, of the seventeenth century, but his thought is no stranger to these contingencies either. Despite or because of its formal claim to the *tabula rasa*, the *cogito* is ‘also’ a subject of its time, brought up to date and with varying popularity. No commentary can fail to refer to the context in which it was produced while at the same time pinpointing its ‘universal’ significance. The universal or universalizable nature of truth does not in fact depend on the neutrality of its enunciation but on the scope of its significance.

Opening a women philosophers’ journal is not then to decide a priori on the structural or conjunctural specificity (or not) of their thought. It means first giving it room for expression, giving it some oxygen. A journal like this however recalls implicitly that, as the saying goes, ‘only the rich get loans’ and ‘charity is for the poor’. A journal of ‘men philosophers’ would indeed be a tautology, a provocation even. A women philosophers’ journal is on the contrary a subversive initiative.

### Philosophy and Western-centrism

Starting a women philosophers’ journal in the twenty-first century, in the international and intercultural perspective of UNESCO, means tackling yet another question: is philosophy a way of thinking that belongs to all cultures, or, as Heidegger said, is it ‘Western-centric’? What does ‘philosophy’ mean to a man or woman from Africa or Asia when it is not an imported product or the product of cultural colonization? Does not a philosophy journal, in so far as it aims to be international and transcultural, according to the principle that inspires UNESCO, give priority to a discipline which has been a stronghold of Western culture in its history and international expansion?

This question is not only for a women's journal, but is formulated more acutely here in that the expansion of Western culture into other continents has imbued more men than women and for longer, so that women come to the philosophical form of thinking later. On this point again, it might be worth rereading Heidegger for his endeavour to make a distinction between thinking and philosophy, because 'what do we call thinking?'. Is not philosophy the way of thinking developed by the West in its project to dominate the world, and which, by differentiating itself from technology nevertheless reveals its close relationship with it? Infinitely more Western-centric than the arts (although for that too we can point to museums, some of which isolate the 'first arts' – a euphemism for what were called only recently the 'primitive arts'). It is to be noted moreover that in the West itself, philosophy is rooted, if not exclusively then at least principally, in a few privileged countries: Greece, Germany, France and England, with offshoots in Italy and Spain, as well as Denmark. And this can only raise problems – does it mean that countries with a strong philosophical tradition are historically less barbarian than the others? Looking back at the twentieth century, one might wonder.

### Disparity of truth

Wherever the truth is spoken, be it divine or human, whether it claims to be revelation or reason, whether it is religious or philosophical, monadic, dialectical or 'disseminated', it is men or at least some men who have been and still are mostly those who 'officiate'. It is as if faith and reason, which bolster the 'truth' and are often thought of as opposed, are, from this standpoint, not different at all. Universalism cannot resolve or conceal this state of affairs any more than queer theory, which is its contemporary version. Probably for ever and in any event since the modern age, from seventeenth-century salons to twentieth-century lecture halls, certain women have been associated with the unfolding of the truth as interlocutors or disciples, but there few women have been able to engage in original philosophical work or have been recognized as having done so. Even in the twentieth century the brotherhood of recognized, or even mediatized, philosophers is still

almost as exclusively masculine (although less celibate) as the priesthood, although some women have nevertheless recently acquired some fame, often via the detour of feminism or gender studies.

Opening up a space of expression for women philosophers means confronting them with the question of the relation between gender and philosophy and the question of the very meaning of philosophy. It means questioning the 'universal' nature of philosophy and confronting its 'phallogocentric' dimension. A women philosophers' journal is then, first of all, a sort of affirmative action which creates a space for women to say what they are thinking without predetermining the subject or modalities of that thinking, which is moreover plural and polymorphous. Such a journal posits a hypothesis of practice. It calls on women to show themselves through thought over and above theory (and beyond the various forms of gender theory that have served as crutches in recent years). It calls on women to manifest themselves through thought, not on a predetermined subject but by establishing their field, however hesitantly.

Such a proposal, which verges on provocation, will undoubtedly not fail to surprise and destabilize the relatively reassuring habits that gender studies had established and defined. For we have gradually elaborated one or more theories of gender that can either be the subject of debate or enter the mainstream, constituting a key and acknowledged vector for intercultural meetings and confrontations. However, beyond these theories, 'what do we call thinking?'

A 'women philosophers' journal' does indeed aim to make room for women, these women philosophers, to express their thinking on any subject at all. Paradoxically, its presupposition frees these women of the need to define themselves, to choose between sex and gender. With the apparent segregation it identifies in its very definition, it is like a tit for tat factual answer. Its gendered characterization, which might seem restrictive ('women' philosophers), moreover holds up a mirror

to the history of philosophy and philosophers, who see in it what they pretended not to know; that they have for centuries been – and still are – among men (and not human beings) and also among Westerners in determining and assuming ‘the universal’.

That is why creating a ‘women philosophers’ journal’ in a major international institution is, very calmly, to ‘make waves’. The initiative might create surprise, or engender some discomfort, or might even seem a retrograde step, at a time when fashionable queer theory, recycling the old universalism, claims to have left behind the gendered duality that this initiative seems to be reviving. But we may recall – with Hegel – that we must always start by ‘assuming’ in order to ‘transcend’. It might be thought that a ‘women philosophers’ journal’ does indeed assume gendered duality as a persistent given, in order to question it, and is thus a vector for access to the philosophical position.

## Irma Julienne ANGUE MEDOUX

### Women's claim to be philosophers is politically incorrect

In societies whose university institutions allow women to gain access to university posts, the status of woman-philosopher may be merely 'politically correct'. As equal access appears guaranteed, a woman's pretension to be a philosopher seems to be accepted immediately merely out of respect for the acknowledged rights of all human beings. However, is she also given the right to philosophize? I contend that a woman's claim to exercise this right is politically incorrect, inasmuch as it requires her to pass judgement on contemporary conditions that bar equal access to the same roles as men and on the philosophical concept of political wisdom itself. Since Plato, the human being has been regarded as a mind that must control its enemy, that is, its desires, its passions and its body. Wisdom seems to consist in establishing and sustaining such control. Various ancient and modern or contemporary schools of political philosophy have therefore sought to ensure such control, thus consolidating the political practice of automatically admitting all women, including women-philosophers, to the scheme of legal, moral and political correctness, in other words, the universally conventional wisdom, established by this practice.

The recognition of women-philosophers brings into play yet another conception of the human being, a conception that is genuinely free from the will to power entailed in human beings' quest for total control over themselves. It entails recognition that life is possible for human beings owing to their identification with language and that communication dynamics themselves rest on philosophy. It therefore necessarily calls into question any consideration of human action and desire in terms of rectitude only.

It does not merely involve, as propounded by Rawls and Habermas, building consensus based on an ersatz judgement passed by a woman-philosopher or by any woman on her living conditions. It is therefore important for the woman-philosopher to show quite ably that the judgements passed by each person on their living conditions are not a priori irrational, that they do not express desires of which men and women should be cured, for they express the truth felt by their speakers as thinking beings who must be viewed as such in terms of their objectivity, and not in terms of whether they are 'politically correct or incorrect' in relation to the legal, moral or political consensus that is supposed to measure the degree of cultural control of the collective or private mind over the 'enemy' – the body and its desires and passions.

Recognition of the status of woman-philosopher thus involves challenging that which is deemed politically correct. It implies questioning the truth of the critical capacities which the narrow categories of modern law, contemporary communication mores and pragmatic policies advocated by contemporary philosophers accord to women. The intellectual emancipation of all women is the issue at stake and the inherent goal of woman-philosopher status recognition. Such an intellectual emancipation must be regarded as an underpinning requirement for women's social emancipation. In this sense, it necessarily blurs the distinction between the politically correct and incorrect and can thus only express a politically incorrect view.

As Richard Rorty wrote in his posthumous work *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, there is no such thing as philosophy that makes no difference and has no consequences. In our view, there is no such thing as philosophy that observes established rules on distinguishing the politically correct from the politically incorrect. Women exercising their fundamental right to philosophy must make a difference in relation to the philosophy of control. The exercise of that right must entail more than mere lip service, as the latter would simply entitle women, too, to form elites culturally in control over themselves, elites with a will to power hallowed by consensus.

### Post-modern gender inequality

'Cultural' or 'intercultural' analyses are well under way in gender studies, but economic globalization, stock market speculation, unemployment, violence, exclusion, homelessness, undocumented immigrants, drug trafficking and mental isolation are ever more quickly on the rise. Contrary to the assumptions drawn from the existence of gender studies, contrary to the hope that they raise of at least achieving greater fairness in gender relations, one cannot but admit that gender inequality is broadening, so much so that this phenomenon seems to be inevitably linked to the inexorable rise of neoliberalism and post-communism. It now arouses nothing but smug resignation, warranted by the sense that nothing will make a difference. It seems that the situation of objective gender unfairness involves too many parameters for people to be able to think beyond the traditional solution of restoring the family nucleus.

Owing to the failure to 'modernize' African, Latin American, Caribbean, Middle Eastern and Far Eastern countries, the most archaic beliefs about behaviour, health, housing and economic and political development are ingrained there. As a result of those failures, capitalism has been generally impugned, as if it represented what is known as 'Western civilization', and there has been a proliferation of all forms of fundamentalism opposed to 'the West', as if it were the world's public enemy number one. Such forms of fundamentalism, wrongly professing allegiance to the monotheistic religions, are known to have had an impact on the plight of women. Muslim fundamentalism practised by the Taleban, for example, has explicitly denied women the right to education and training and has blithely reinstated the tradition of women's submission to their husbands, as if womanhood were synonymous with unredeemable mindlessness. The cultural havens afforded by such fundamentalisms in reaction to neoliberal fundamentalism have thus helped to make cultural globalization sound the 'death knell of women intellectuals'.

There is no reason, however, for male philosophers, or simply men, to uphold outdated and unjustifiable traditions that force all women in their group to obey their husbands blindly in family and public life. The only justifiable traditions that may subsist alongside modern democratic practices are those that respect each person's ability to appraise their own living conditions. In the Africa context, as well as in many Muslim contexts in the Middle East, flagrant examples of indefensible male domination of women can be found daily.

In these circumstances, if intellectuals – whether male or female – shun their critical role which is their duty, this would mean that they agree not to exist as intellectuals and become accomplices to traditional male chauvinism, while parasitically enjoying its advantages that are anything but secondary in daily life. In that connection, polygamy persists as a common practice in Africa, and male intellectuals or philosophers dare not be involved in regulating or condemning it. Must equally outdated and unjustifiable polyandry be introduced one day so that psychoanalysts will courageously stop being benignly neutral and will encourage male philosophers and human scientists to stop professing neutrality towards its 'values', considering they 'have done enough' by merely describing, for instance, female circumcision? In order to be taken seriously, must women cultivate an attitude as aggressive as those of men who refuse any dialogue with their female counterparts? We do not think so.

The example of polygamy, which is widely occurring, shows in my opinion that which intellectuals, both men and women, philosophers and non-philosophers, should voice critical views in order to elucidate the conditions on which emancipation should be available to all, simply because everyone is equal, being users of language, speakers who participate in transforming living conditions when they happen to be unbearable. Intellectual emancipation is indeed the only guarantee that philosophers can transmit to any other person the capacity for judgement that they have acquired and that they are beholden to share. This is required for social emancipation founded on relations of social justice that are acceptable as such to everyone. It is for intellectuals to make politicians recognize the need to provide their citizens with training institutions that are appropriate to this end.



### Ineffective theories of justice and feminist demands

In regard to intersubjective and social relations between men and women, the two prevailing models of theories of justice must openly acknowledge their weaknesses and limitations and leave the way free for feminist protests.

Although Rawls's neoliberal theory grants a general and abstract access to social and civil liberties to all social partners – and therefore also to women after they had struggled harrowingly for social emancipation – the fact that women are now relegated to household responsibilities appear in this theory as a natural – though unfortunate – consequence of rising unemployment.

Although some world democracies have gradually granted to women the formal status of 'fully fledged citizens' and, consequently, the long-coveted status of voters, encouraging them to abide by Habermas' 'constitutional patriotism', women citizens have been doomed, owing to the rise of racism and closed communitarianism in the United States, nationalism in Eastern and Western Europe and the surge of religious fundamentalism in the Middle East and Far East, simply to bow to choices imposed upon them, without any prior discussion. Women citizens therefore have the same social status as minors, subservient and required to show unconditional respect for family and social rites that are themselves functionally integrated as part and parcel of advanced industrial societies.

The granting of gender parity may well be advocated by the most progressive parties in countries true to Enlightenment ideals such as equality among free and rational beings, but denial of such parity is the main goal pursued by nationalist or fundamentalist movements in other countries, in particular in those undergoing civil wars. The murder of heroines who champion women's rights, the unpunished rape of women belonging to the 'other' nation – the enemy nation during the wars in the former Yugoslavia –

and electoral bans imposed by various dictatorships all show, each in its own way, how greatly and seriously the dissolution of social bonds affects gender relations. These are simply specific examples of daily practices indicative of social bonds undergoing change: the disintegration of the nuclear family is one of the most common, dramatic and far-reaching symptoms of social bonds being broken and of alternative informal bonds being similarly dissolved.

In these circumstances, the cultural and intercultural analyses conducted in gender studies – which in most cases, merely attempt to establish a feminist counteracting force by reproducing the narrow-mindedness and ritual abuse of male demands – are incapable to promote recognition of women as social beings. Indeed, the concept of a counteracting force is clearly calqued on the male representation of power to which it is opposed, as it merely attempts to shift the balance of power, viewed as control over others whose freedom is pre-empted as a danger that needs to be neutralized.

This ritualization of the gender struggle following on from the domination of one gender by another does not entail women-specific forms of political organization. It merely establishes typical ideals of women fighters next to male fighters, all guided, moulded, replenished and nurtured by capitalist liberalism, or it produces only republican heroines, humanitarian and 'green' mothers, mere right-minded imitations of honoured males.

### The emergence of women-philosophers

Even though the ritual gender battles acutely raise awareness of the unfairness women suffered, attempts to enforce women's rights nonetheless go hand in hand with a gradual recognition of a common nature of men and women as communicators.

This common nature has underpinned the domination of one gender by another (women's desire today, akin to men's, to control the self and others is simply

a distorted and exaggerated emanation). But the domination of women by men has been achieved only by forcing women to deny, in one way or another, any such commonality. The constraints that now compel general awareness of the aggravated forms of the situation of unfairness also compel recognition, behind these forms of 'cultural' subordination and psycho-social subalternation, of a women-specific autonomy: that which women have had to cultivate simply to survive in such conditions of alienation and which reflects the way in which they have coped with gender difference by performing the roles of recipient and addressee that, from the outset, placed them at a reflex distance from having an appetite for control.

This form of autonomy was imperceptible while it was intermingled with relations required by religions and was associated with the 'natural' domination of male over female creatures. Ever since the Enlightenment when philosophers challenged the identification of all beings with the 'natural' domination of one gender over another, the issue of fairness has been regarded merely as determination to ensure homogeneous conditions of effective equality without, however, allowing the emergence of women's specific autonomy, inherited from their earlier status.

That autonomy, already at work in communications, cultural and institutional relations, is nonetheless the yardstick against which the real difficulties that still preclude women's access to that much-coveted abstract equality must be gauged. Is the obligation placed upon women to seek equal civil status, 'parity', not as abstract as the law of legal systems known, since Hegel and Kant, to be concerned with interpersonal relations inasmuch as they involve mutual appropriation and self-appropriation, calqued on the way in which people relate to the ownership and transformation of objects? Would the granting of strictly equal economic and political conditions suffice to guarantee the formal and negative freedom which women wish to possess, as men do, and would it magically turn them into 'moral and responsible' beings as soon as they have been recognized as such? Would it even win them respect as partners in political parties?

Does the actual and necessary situation of women in communication relations promoted by the legal, moral and political institutions inherited from modernity not imply, too, that different fundamental categories should be used to analyse the roles that they have played and continue to play in institutions powered by communication dynamics rather than the domination and control dynamics with which they have been associated? What role did women really play in the development of actual relations in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century civil society? What role did they perform in the formation of primitive and monotheistic religions?

What is their role today in the development of human experimentation on humans, when men seek to impose on their social partners the pragmatic identification as recipient and addressee that has always guided women and been their sole prerogative? Does it suffice to assign the recipient role to men and women alike to force them to see each other in the requisite light as consensual beings? Or, to describe gender equality requirements fairly, must one specific dimension of that role, namely judgement, which is gender blind and exercised in a gender-neutral manner, be acknowledged?

Only effective recognition of each woman's capacity to be accordingly a philosopher can in law and in practice ensure access to social equality and thus to social emancipation. To gain such access, women already known as philosophers must make men and women acknowledge the truth of their judgements.

## Brigitte SITBON-PEILLON

There will be no cessation of evils for the sons of men, till either those who are pursuing a right and true philosophy receive sovereign power in the states, or those in power in the states by some dispensation of providence become true philosophers.<sup>1</sup>

1. Plato, *Republic*, 473d.

When Plato expounds the idea of 'philosopher-kings' in Book V of the *Republic*, he effectively postulates that government is necessarily a matter for men and that 'there is a conjunction of these two things, political power and philosophical intelligence'. These two prerequisites for the foundation of the ideal city-state are interwoven and, taken to the extreme, constitute what could be termed the 'sophism of misogyny' in Plato's work. Together they surreptitiously conceal the hitherto unexplored twin issue of the gender of politics and of philosophy. Must politics and philosophy be performed by the provinces of men, as asserted incidentally by Plato?

By referring to 'kings' and 'princes', the author of the *Republic* naturally tips the scales of politics in favour of men. This may seem obvious at first sight and hardly worth mentioning, since women's place and status in ancient Greek cities were confined to housekeeping and bearing children (preferably sons). Furthermore, although Plato occasionally called for women's lot to be improved so that they would no longer be viewed as 'chattels', he nonetheless regarded women as a degenerate form of human nature:

It is only males who are created directly by the gods and are given souls. Those who live rightly return to the stars, but those who are cowards or lead unrighteous lives may with reason be supposed to have changed into the nature of women in the second generation. This downward progress may continue through successive reincarnations unless reversed. In this situation, obviously it is only men who are complete human beings and can hope for ultimate fulfilment; the best a woman can hope for is to become a man.<sup>2</sup>

2. Plato, *Timaeus*, 90e.

The gender issue is addressed here through a perversion of gender. Womanhood is portrayed as a curse. '*On la dit femme, on la diffame*' ('She is called woman and is thus defamed'), as Lacan

would retort to Plato, and the notion of 'philosopher-kings' simply perpetuates the idea of 'enhanced humanity' in respect of men and 'less humanity' in respect of women.

The misogyny in Plato's discourse is ultimately exacerbated by the second principle postulated, namely the necessary and intimate link between political power and philosophy. Supreme leaders could indeed dabble in philosophy and thinkers could take up the reins of the power – that was all mere contingency and simply the logical consequence of a state of affairs in which men in society enjoyed full freedom and engaged in practices from which women were barred anyway. However, his postulate of a necessary and inextricable (crucial to state survival) link between political power and philosophy amounted to women being excluded precisely because they could not accede to the highest office. If politics and philosophy must be mutually contingent, then women will logically be excluded from both spheres at the same time. Plato would have considered the notion that women can govern to be as absurd as the idea that women can philosophize.

Admittedly, Plato's misogyny may initially be 'exculpated', in purely linguistic terms, by highlighting the 'gender neutrality' of the word 'philosopher', as in Greek – as in French or English – the same term is used both in the masculine and the feminine and gender is determined only by the article used, namely *hō philosophos* for the masculine and *hē philosophos* for the feminine. However, although the translation of the Greek word *philosophos* by the French word '*philosophe*' or the English word 'philosopher' may be ambiguous, the word 'king' is not, being quite distinct from its opposite 'queen'. Plato did use the word 'king' and, but for the studied avoidance of the gender issue, he should have included 'philosopher-queens' among supreme rulers.

It is therefore the assertion of the double coincidence and even identity of the political and philosophical spheres that has led to the exclusion of women from the world of politics and subsequently from that of philosophy. If politics falls within the purview of kings, then its gender must be vested in philosophers, then it will perforce be a matter for men and for men only.

Consequently, the mere thought that there could be women philosophers would entail in-depth reconsideration of this Platonic sophism, which could give rise to infinite variations of incongruous statements, all with equally inept conclusions and premises. For example:

All kings must be philosophers;  
All philosophers must be kings;  
Kings and philosophers are men;  
Therefore all men are kings and philosophers.

Or even:

All philosophers must be kings;  
All kings must be philosophers;  
Kings can only be men;  
Therefore all philosophers are men.

In attempting to understand Plato's words (and underlying statements) in this way, it becomes apparent that they rest on many premises that, through the ages, must have influenced the emergence and, naturally, fruition of the very idea of women philosophers. Indeed, if these Platonic sophisms convey any truth, albeit truncated, then in order to be women philosophers women must clear two obstacles – one political, namely self-empowerment to take up the reins of government, and the other philosophical, namely assertion of the free exercise of reason.

The philosophical act would consist in taking political power and would be the indispensable condition for such power. To be a philosopher, one must have political authority and assert one's masculinity by exhibiting it through supreme power. Therefore, if power and philosophy are inextricably linked, then women philosophers could, in the same way as men, claim the title of 'philosopher-queens', provided that they act concurrently as both.

One possible alternative, however, consists in taking a new approach to politics and philosophy and in considering the correlation between them to be contingent rather than necessary.

It is not to be expected that kings will philosophize or that philosophers will become kings; nor is it to be desired, however, since the possession of power inevitably corrupts the free judgment of reason. Kings or sovereign peoples (i.e. those governing themselves by egalitarian laws) should not, however, force the class of philosophers to disappear or to remain silent, but should allow them to speak publicly. This is essential to both in order that light may be thrown on their affairs. And since the class of philosophers is by nature incapable of forming seditious factions or clubs, they cannot incur suspicion of disseminating propaganda.<sup>3</sup>

By positing, in the above opposition to Plato, a contingent link between politics and philosophy, thus nullifying the idea of philosopher-kings, Kant would unwittingly (and is thus not less misogynous than Plato) – at least in theory – open up the world of philosophy to women but not necessarily the world of politics. Women would perhaps win recognition as philosophers owing to Kant's delinking of politics and philosophy, which would in turn spotlight the gender issue in philosophy itself, but in terms of sexual difference and thus as a social reality.

The contingent link posited between the philosophical act and political authority does not suffice, however, to install women philosophers victoriously as such; such insufficiency shows that Plato was, to some extent, right to link them necessarily, even though his attempts to train tyrants such as those of Syracuse failed. Although there are women philosophers today, they still face all kinds of pockets of resistance in an intellectual world that is by and large still steeped in atavistic misogyny.

The recent suicide of the brilliant philosopher Marie-Claude Lorne,<sup>4</sup> who felt rejected by her academic milieu, shows to what extent being a woman philosopher involves an implicit correlation between political power and philosophy. It may, of course, be surmised that this intellectual was driven to committing suicide for reasons not directly linked to

3. Kant, *Idea of a Universal History on a Cosmopolitical Plan*.

4. Marie-Claude Lorne was assistant lecturer at the Université de Brest, France. She committed suicide on 22 September 2008 after receiving the news that the commission of specialists refused her entitlement. This decision was voted unanimously by only two members of the commission who were present, instead of the dozen members who usually form the quorum. According to some of M.-C. Lorne's colleagues, this sanction would be directly linked with the unfriendly atmosphere and the harassment suffered by the victim since she took up her post in this faculty. Following this event, Valérie Pécresse, Minister of Higher Education, recently announced the creation of a Commission of Deontology for staff recruitment.



her essence as a woman philosopher, but this aspect may not be disregarded either inasmuch as the practice of philosophy is seen as an end in itself and as it does not confer a merely contingent attribute on the practitioners, whether male or female, but actually defines their inner being.

Her suicide tragically shows that if women are to make a name for themselves as philosophers and achieve incontrovertibly the status of women philosophers, then they must assert within the society both a measure of authority (in the broad sense of the term) and some capacity for thought, and thus become, at least metaphorically, philosopher-queens. However, in view of their status and the social, intellectual and even physical obstacles that they must overcome, there is indeed a measure of masculinity in those who may be dubbed female philosophers. As female philosophers become established, the feminine is incidentally and paradoxically somewhat eschewed, giving way to the masculine, in the sense of assertion of virile (or phallic) strength. As Plato considered womanhood to be a curse and women to be lesser beings or an ontological degeneration, then being a woman philosopher would conversely imply enhancement of women's masculinity, in short, the assertion of women's virility. In this context, these terms do not necessarily refer to strictly sexual differentiation, as in Plato's work, or even to generic differences; rather they connote the sorts of 'mixed-gender' qualities characteristic of human beings, in whom masculine and feminine traits intermingle, and no longer bear the antagonistic connotations of a 'greater being' or a 'lesser being'. Drawing on this 'mixed-gender' approach, societies could thus be governed equally well by philosopher-kings or philosopher-queens, by men philosophers or women philosophers, in a word, by philosophers, with philosophy transcending the gaps that language itself has closed by making 'philosopher' a 'transgender' word.

## Monique DAVID-MÉNARD

### A historical example

A few months before the publication of my work *La Folie dans la raison pure. Kant lecteur de Swedenborg* (Madness in pure reason. Kant reading Swedenborg) in 1990, I submitted to a philosophy journal an article entitled 'Kant and the patience of limits'. The editor turned it down for publication with a dismissive 'Even if it were true, it shouldn't be said'. For ten years or so I avoided meeting that philosopher and, when I did see him again, I launched into our resumption of contact with a reminder of that episode, but he had forgotten! I do not think that my article was unpublishable, as the work in question was accepted a few months later by a highly respectable publishing house and has since been translated extensively. Incidentally it was a man, too, who took the decision to publish; so refusal stems not from any masculine essence in philosophers, but rather from something that kindles, in men philosophers, a certain superego idea of the conceptual exercise.

What did I write then, in that text, that was so greatly at odds with a certain idea of philosophy represented and defended mainly by men? I argued that a philosophy like that of Kant, far from being able to confine itself to its own conceptual organization, should be understood as the articulation of anthropological and fantastical features and of concept invention. On rereading the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) in the light of another Kantian text, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Illustrated by Dreams of Metaphysics* (1766), and of his essay on negative magnitudes (1763), both reputed to be of minor significance, I detected in them the importance, for Kant, of a twofold concern: defining a new negation logic (understood not in the dialectical sense of contradiction but in the sense of the 'real conflict' which allows the reality of objects of knowledge to be constituted as against the delirious dreams of metaphysics); and protecting himself from what was both a fascination with and a horror of madness. These two themes are in fact closely linked in the bid to redefine metaphysics as 'a science of the limits of human reason'.

The importance of objects in knowledge, following on from the logic of real conflict, consists in keeping reason clear of the temptation of delirium. I therefore questioned the founding ambition of critical and transcendental philosophy, if by foundation we mean the mastery by thought of principles. There is, as it happens in the position of principles, a partially unjustifiable act in the terms recognized by philosophy which affirms evidence of it.

Even and particularly if he is a 'great philosopher', a thinker such as Kant almost succeeds in effacing in the writing of his 'major' works what compels him to elaborate a new doctrine and pertains to fantasy, in his case the dread of being 'mad like Swedenborg'. What then is so intolerable in the idea that the invention of a new negation logic was the logical and philosophical means that Kant devised to extricate himself from the fascination and horror prompted in him by the celebrity and madness of the magus Swedenborg? Everything of course lies in the 'almost', as the texts in which everyone can read of the articulation of concepts with fantasies exist, but they are kept separate from Kant's canonical theses. I also affirmed that this effacement shaped the Kantian text itself and, much more radically, the interpretations of Kant by commentators. A little later, when I defended my thesis on the subject, what I had to say was ridiculed by another 'philosopher' as I argued, he said, that the table of the forms of 'nothing' (which completes the table of categories in the first *Critique*) was decisive because it came in the middle of the *Critique of Pure Reason* ... A woman philosopher who was also on the thesis jury said on the other hand that 'we shall never forget your interpretation of Kant'. What then was the crux of the debate?

### That which is sexuated in thought

We can understand that what is intolerable to many men philosophers and yet less fearsome for women philosophers is the idea that the founding ambition of a philosophy includes blind spots, and that the universality of a philosophical system is affected by the singularity of a subjective position in thinking. Between what psychoanalysts call desires at work and the purity of concepts, the boundary is unsteady and it is important to show this, not in order to downgrade a philosophical venture but to assess in another manner not only its genesis

but above all its systematicity – which was more than one member of my thesis jury could stand! It may be added that the men philosophers who rejected such an interpretation were also in a position of power – both publishing and academic – which gave their sightlessness a chance to come into play. That is so and yet, because it is too obvious, it is not the point that I wish to emphasize.

I should like rather to address the following question which shifts the point of intervention a little: what is sexuated in the exercise of conceptual thinking? However, I just offer one clarification on the actual meaning of this formulation. I am not asking how the 'difference of the sexes' affects the purity of concepts but how 'what is sexuated' concerns thinking. For what decides all desiring and thinking subjects to recognize themselves as such is more complex than the mere 'difference of the sexes'. Sexuation is decided in a register where the masculine and the feminine as fixed and clearly separate determinations are strangely enough irrelevant. In general, what decides us to feel woman or man is made of social roles on the one hand and, on the other, of impulsive combinations that come into place as a result of circuits of pleasure, displeasure and anxiety for which the difference between feminine and masculine is not an *a priori* factor. Just as the universality of a philosophical system is a result and not an essential feature of philosophy, so sexuation as man or as woman is a result of a number of experiences and trials, trials of love and of separation, which means that, there again, the difference is not 'pure'. Our sexuated identifications are made up of borrowings and partial objects and they are the outcome of compromise. But we call sexual what is woven together in the hope of pleasures ever delineated by fantasy, as well as by the points of horror that we flee and the situations of anxiety which mark us out.

It is in the image of thought defended above all by men that a woman philosopher does not believe; when I say woman I include some men whose sexuation was decided in a departure from the long-prevailing models of what constitutes a 'man'.

It will be said for a start that 'woman' and 'man' are notions that philosophy rejects outright in the name of the universality of the forms of thought that it develops. As reason transcends all the particular determinations of the subjects drawn into the wake of its demands, it is difficult to see how a gender difference – a difference of symbolic role within a social group or of sexuated identity in the sense that the need to be recognized is contingent on the fabrication of fantasies replete with hope of pleasure, and with ordeals of anxiety – could affect it. Yet facts are stubborn: when a woman produces a philosophical work, her style and construction often set it apart from most of the existing material written by men. Examples in this respect are Catherine of Siena, Hannah Arendt, Simone Weil or, closer to us, Claude Imbert, Barbara Cassin and Judith Butler. It is on the basis of this difference in how they address various fields of knowledge, how they bring closer together areas reputed different and whose difference is proclaimed unbridgeable, that some works have what is termed a feminine character. There are boundaries in which women do not believe.

#### Two examples: Michel Foucault and Alain Badiou

To fall in with the programme set out by the title, 'What women philosophers think of men philosophers', the point indeed is neither to analyse a difference between men and women when it comes to philosophy nor to make of the difference of the sexes a decried and yet insistent philosophical issue, but rather to say in what respect a philosophical work by a woman requires a spontaneous divergence (which becomes a method) in contrast to canonical works written by men.

That presupposes a divergence in contrast to the works written by men opening up paths which are not their own. There is in the recognition and subsequent application of this divergence an at least implicit criticism of what remains masculine in the 'major texts' of philosophy; this is so not only when philosophers speak or write about women and their place in culture, in thought and in power relationships, but also in the determination of a path of thought which presupposes a judgement on the effacement of the conditions of conceptual creation.

It is this effacement that women philosophers find typically masculine in reputedly universal works. Not reflecting conceptually on the sex-linked conditions of philosophical creation goes hand in hand with the manner of clinging in a superego way to the unquestioned dualities – the empirical and the transcendental, feeling and rationality, body and soul, theory and practice – and of leaving unquestioned the recognized divisions between branches of knowledge and whose differentiation actually requires classifications that are not devised but accepted as self-evident.

The counter-example is provided by the position of some men whose sexuation follows other paths than the classic models of masculinity and who also transform into philosophical invention the sexual malaise in which they find themselves. Everyone knows that Michel Foucault was not destined to possess urges shifting the partial drives of childhood towards a genital urge coupled with a form of love of the opposite sex compatible with reproduction...

He transformed that malaise with respect to the dominant models of sexuation into a new conception of the 'critique' which shows up how thought always makes a diagnosis of the present, of what, in our actuality, begins to be no longer our present. He thereby not only illustrated the subjective departure of his sexuation but the latter let him define, through this diagnosis, terrains of rationality challenging the separation usually established between kinds of knowledge and kinds of power.

Or again, this same departure, compelling for him, let him analyse the formations of language by identifying in them a dimension that could be discerned neither by structural analysis of signifying systems, nor by grammar, nor by logic. And the divisions not previously thought caused him to speak of the statements (énoncés), of disposition of knowledge forms as *epistemai* no longer taking scientific criteria as the norm, of apparatuses or dispositifs which defy the distinction between theory and practice, and finally of positivity or positivité, a term he pressed for in fact because it allowed a new realism to be defined that escaped the age-old alternative of nominalism and realism. This is what makes *The Archaeology of Knowledge* a great book.

This linkage of thoughts to impulsive conditions does not affect the worth of a philosophy. Besides, in Foucault himself the subjective departure which motivated his thinking was transformed into sets of themes that were more or less relevant according to the case. For example, the knowledge configurations – transverse in relation to the recognized disciplines – which he defined in *The Order of Things* were extensively discussed by several ‘specialists’ on whose ground he ventured. Does the analysis of wealth have the same knowledge disposition as general grammar or the mathesis universalis? Is it the case that the historicity of work and the notion of value come under the same type of concepts as temporal thickness of organisms in the register of living beings? That can be and has been discussed. But this makes clear the intersection of impulses and concepts, which in classical organizations remains unmentioned. That does not prevent the universality of the thought thus produced, but it is a result and not a principle; a result of certain bridges built between the experience of a hiatus in the culture and the delimitation of novel conceptual constructions questioning the dualities given as self-evident. The important thing here is that the intersection of a subjective exigency and the construction of general problem areas should not be effaced by the position of a universality of thought which is but an outcome.

If we turn, on the contrary, to the requirement of many men to declare as philosophical only a theory that manages, through the formalization of its theses, to break with the conditions (in particular sexuated) of its elaboration, it can be said that this position of reason as alien and transcendental looks, to a woman’s way of seeing it, like the act of taking the floor while partially effacing the subject doing so, and not like a truth. The deductive presentation and the systematic closing off of thought pertain to a style and not to an accomplished separation of concepts in relation to anthropological and fantastical givens which are the conditions in which thought is elaborated and its objects determined. One of the best contemporary examples is the philosophy of Alain Badiou: the systematicity of what he enunciates, the consistency of what he states on the basis of ontology, understood as a matheme of being and of the

supernumerary event, are given by him as independent of subjectivity. Yet in the four truth procedures that he defines – science, love, political revolution, and poetry – his conception of love as radically distinct from sexual desire which would be incapable, on its own, of producing a truth rests on an intersection of love and the impulses which perpetuate, more clearly than in Jacques Lacan whom he nevertheless uses as a reference, the old distinction of body and mind. A woman will rather propose to get round this duality instead of keeping it on and including it in the very idea of truth. A woman philosopher will consider that the consequent Platonism of this philosophy remains dependent on a position of masculine desire, namely on the gesture whereby a man philosopher effaces from his enunciations certain givens on the basis of which he thinks and which compel him to think.

These few remarks do not of course suffice to characterize this work which has unfolded in seeking to bridge the gap between ontology and the non-formal use of thought which characterized *Being and Event*. The instrument of this filling-in is a logic which seeks to rethink the intersection of the real and thought. However, *Logics of Worlds* does not put an end to ontology as the matheme of being. In his recent interpretation of Lacan's aphorism 'There is no sexual relationship', when apropos of love he addresses the relationships between real, knowledge and truth, the separation between the empirical, ever supposed to be impure, and the universality of the mathemes is the main distinctive feature of this effacement at work where fantasies and concepts are linked. This effacement is at once an inherent resource of philosophy and its blind spot.

A woman will not regard this distinction as relevant in the absolute, but she will speculate on how the division is established in each case. A woman will not deny that thought is universal. But this universality does not define rationality. It is but the consequence of this effacement at work which remains detectable in the very organization of a philosophical system.



**To speak about different things,  
we must speak differently**

## Justine YOMAN BINDEDOU

For a few years now, a new deal has been advertised: participatory democracy,<sup>1</sup> which is difficult to distinguish from representative democracy.<sup>2</sup> It is becoming a benchmark, in that it is regarded as more dynamic, being driven by men and women from all walks of life and not by a political elite or a community of citizens, as advocated in Greek democracy in antiquity.<sup>3</sup> The heritage of ancient republicanism has thus come to an end. That heritage, transmitted from Renaissance times, had long projected an ideal of virile heroism, resulting in the subjugation of foreigners, slaves and women, not only because of the kind of work in production and reproduction they were restricted to, but also, and above all, because they were excluded from knowledge and were thus denied the right to independent thought – a point highlighted in the story of the liberation of Western<sup>4</sup> and African<sup>5</sup> women.

Social progress and transformation have now changed the situation so much that Boutros Boutros-Ghali<sup>6</sup> was surely right to claim that more power for women means more power for humanity as a whole.<sup>7</sup> In other words, emphasis is now laid on actually involving women in socio-cultural and intellectual activities, as a means of restoring women's right to think independently and to be openly involved in staking claims for their socio-political well-being. The attempt to increase women's political clout heralds in a change advocated by the liberation movements underpinning participatory democracy,<sup>8</sup> women's involvement in all areas of life in reparation for the injustice suffered since time immemorial. Although such a breakthrough by women, or their liberation, is still somewhat timid, it is nonetheless a matter of genuine concern. That concern is the focus of all kinds of critical views and is of the essence to the solution of cultural, economic, political or social development problems, thus refuting the old myths about women being incapable of holding political office. On this basis, the millennia-old domestication of women and all forms of phallogratization of political power are obviously evidence of the violation of women's rights. This revolution raises a number of questions, as do all major upheavals.

1. A form of power-sharing and exercising of power, based on strengthening citizens' participation in political decision-making.

2. In opposition to authoritarian regimes, representation is ensured by universal suffrage.

3. In Ancient Greece, especially in a city like Athens, democracy meant first and foremost independence from the outside world, a precondition of freedom of speech for the city's citizens. In Athens, politicians practised direct democracy: citizens were allowed to speak and vote in the Agora, the city's place of assembly. Ancient democracy, however, was not based upon the equality of all. Slaves, metics and women were excluded from citizenship and had no political rights.

4. See 'Shakespeare's Sister', the Marie Curie legend, 'there is no female Mozart...'

5. In Africa, mainly in Côte d'Ivoire, 70 per cent of women are illiterate. They are housekeepers and housewives, only 30 per cent of women having the good fortune to be educated.

6. Boutros Boutros-Ghali was the sixth Secretary-General of the United Nations, from January 1992 to December 1996.

7. These words were spoken in Beijing on the occasion of the Fourth World Conference on Women. In *Jeune Afrique*, No. 2356, 5–11 March 2006.

8. The idea of participatory democracy is contemporaneous with the women's and human rights movements of the 1960s.

How is it that women, oppressed since antiquity and only seldom genuinely aware of their servitude, are emerging from that state today? Perceived as inferior beings, long labelled the 'weaker sex' and, above all, evincing such a mind-set, how is it that they are today regarded as free human beings, capable of exercising professions that were previously the preserve of free men? Although these concerns seem real and important, they must not, for all that, divert us from the goal of giving prominence to women's and their supporters' efforts to secure their inclusion – without any other form of procedural action – in the State's normal process of development. The crucial question now arises of why men's intellectual and physical superiority has now been dissolved into women's scope for action on an equal footing with men. This new stance seems to undermine the age-old idea of women adapting to subservience, domestication and the psychological corruption of being gripped by weakness and incapable of intellectual or political pursuits, which gives a fairly clear idea of the gender division of labour<sup>9</sup> and of social gender relations.

As a matter of fact, everything seems to conspire to make women's issues the new criteria of human development, thus leading to a positive reappraisal of, among other things, Plato's theory, long rejected and deemed provocative of Athenian democracy. Plato considered that women should be involved in all professional fields, including the army, in order to build a just city.<sup>10</sup> Controversial at the time, this idea is now considered a truism. Whatever the reservations of ultra-conservatives and anti-feminists, the place of women seems crucial to the future of modern societies. The momentum created by Plato was enshrined in Fourier's idea that social progress and epochal changes depended on the rate of women's progress in society, progress towards being free.

The converse contributes to socio-political decadence and to the decline and termination of women's freedom. The politicians' emphasis on the integration and promotion of women in all fields is basically consistent with the issue of universality, to which democratic systems and, indirectly, human rights give pride of place. The *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*<sup>11</sup> speaks volumes.

9. This notion was initially used by ethnologists to refer to a 'complementary' distribution of tasks between men and women in societies under study; thus, Lévi-Strauss viewed it as the mechanism that structured society into families. However, women anthropologists will give it a different content, showing that it does not indicate a complementarity of tasks but, most certainly, the relation of men's power over women.

10. Plato, *Republic*, 451e-452d.

11. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted on 18 December 1979 by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

It is therefore important here to enquire into the main reasons for this reconsideration of the status of women, not in any incidental or ephemeral causes, but in the very implementation of the blueprint for democracy, in the protests and in women's struggles for their liberation.

This study will first of all review in substantive terms the domestication of women denied the right to think by being consigned to the private sphere deemed ideal for their fulfilment. Categorization as 'female' will be analysed as damaging to democracy, which, in this particular case, excluded instead of including women. Feminist theories critical of democracy but designed to reveal the emancipatory potential inherent in the democratic system, despite its apparent limitations, will then be highlighted. Lastly, the potential threats that specific identities (goal of the feminists' struggle) pose to democracy, expressed most tangibly in the neutrality and universality of human rights, will be analysed. These lines of enquiry will give insights into the ambiguity of the coexistence question and, more generally, into gender interrelation in a democratic public arena.

### The domestication of women

The history of the status of women revolves around women's relegation to the domestic sphere. Whether viewed from a religious, social or political standpoint, this fact appears deeply significant and could be explained by an appreciation of the concepts of difference and equality, which are its defining features. According to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the source of gender difference lies in human nature itself. Men and women are different but equal in dignity: 'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.'<sup>12</sup> This fundamental truth, enshrined in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, lies, for Christians, in God's act of creation: 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.'<sup>13</sup>

12. *Genesis* 1:26–27, King James version.

13. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Article I.

Although women were portrayed in early Christianity as dominated beings who were meant to be dominated,<sup>14</sup> it was nevertheless considered that gender equality should be recognized and accepted in structuring social and political relations. Gender difference should not be compared in terms of superiority or inferiority, inequality or discrimination. Men and women were equals and complemented each other. Together they expressed in full the beauty of human nature and reflected God's image. No human organization could thrive unless it positively accepted that essential complementarity. Accordingly, in addressing the principle of creation and God's gratuitous action, the Second Ecumenical Council Vatican II declared: 'Breaking the relation of communion with God causes a rupture in the internal unity of the human person, in the relations of communion between man and woman and of the harmonious relations between mankind and other creatures. It is in this original estrangement that are to be sought the deepest roots of all the evils that afflict social relations between people, of all the situations in economic and political life that attack the dignity of the person, that assail justice and solidarity.'<sup>15</sup> In Christianity as proposed by Pope John XXIII, it was acknowledged that women had the same rights as men and were men's companions. They were, therefore, that other half without which humanity itself would not exist. Consequently, men and women ensured, together, the perpetuation of the human race.

14. *Genesis* 3:16.

15. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Part One, Chapter 1, Section I b, para. 27.

That Christian vision is belied by the age-old tradition that stigmatizes women, mounting arguments, based on difference, that keep women and men apart. This automatically raises a series of questions such as what makes them different and how that difference is manifested. In fact, gender difference seems to be the basis of the division within the human species, for there is an anatomical and physiological difference between men and women. This is a sexual difference, backed up by specific male and female attributes: testosterone in the case of male virility, and progesterone, the palpable sign of maternity in women. This outline must obviously not be viewed as drawing a rigid distinction between women's differing situation throughout history. It must be borne in mind, above all, that gender differences are specific to each people's culture and to each period. Whatever the culture, however, women are by definition wives and mothers, in other words, their place is in the domestic sphere, while the public and political spheres belongs to men.

Evolutionary psychologists consider it true that the biological origin of those features that are naturally associated with gender are the hallmarks of sexual differentiation, but other social and cultural influences, which allow the gender issue to be broached, not routinely but statistically, should not be forgotten. From this perspective, there is no objective justification for gender hierarchization, in that: 'the situations of men and women are not the product of a biological destiny but are primarily social constructs. Men and women are much more than a collection – or two collections – of biologically distinct individuals. They form two social groups involved in specific social relations: the social gender relations.'<sup>16</sup> According to Françoise Héritier, aversion for the female sex has resulted in an interpretation of social and political gender relations that reveals an ambiguous form of duality viewed as a conflict, in which the man is automatically the victor. In other words, it is women's classification as sexual beings that has led to their exclusion from the public arena and their confinement to the home and to the repetitive burden of reproduction.

In a way, women are excluded from citizenship by their sexuality, for citizenship confers the opportunity to participate in politics. Now women were denied this opportunity, even though they transmitted citizenship to male children, that is to say, to free men. Accordingly, Aristotle claimed that women's virtues were not the same as men's. The moral virtues of each sex are gender-specific: a woman's temperance is not the same as a man's, nor are her courage or her fair-mindedness. A man's courage is the courage of a master, a woman's that of a subordinate, and the same applies to other virtues. In Aristotle's view, there was no question of creating equality between men and women. The two were different by design and such differentiation justified the domination of the former over the latter.

It was women's distinctive characteristics as sexual beings that led to their servitude, preserved their status as inferior beings through the ages and worsened their subjection. In terms of their moral and physical strength, women could, of course, develop in the same way as men, but they were in a position of inferiority and weakness once they performed the reproductive role characteristic of womanhood.

16. Danièle Kergoat, in *Dictionnaire critique du féminisme*, enlarged 2nd ed., Paris, PUF, 2007.

Owing to their natural aptitudes and their social role – notably, pregnancy, childbirth and child-raising – they required the care and protection of men. According to Poulain de la Barre, 'since the inconveniences of pregnancy and its consequences took their toll on a woman's strength ... preventing her from working as before, her husband's help became absolutely indispensable to her, especially when she already had children.'<sup>17</sup> This occasional weakness has unfortunately become so institutionalized that women are associated with the reproductive function and so are sidelined and debarred from the intellectual and social tasks in which they could have engaged in asserting their freedom.

17. François Poulain de La Barre, *De l'Égalité des Deux Sexes* [1673], Paris, Fayard, 1984, p. 21.

The argument that gender inequality was based on the capacity to reproduce was put forward by many feminists, such as Simone de Beauvoir and Françoise Héritier. In Héritier's view, however, pregnancy was the basis of inequality in that it aroused jealousy in men, who, to compensate for that shortcoming, devalued women socially by relegating them to secondary roles.<sup>18</sup> Women were confined to the domestic sphere because of the origin and contingent nature of bias against them. This status is no more than a form of servitude that ultimately convinced women that they were naturally different from men and had a natural duty to submit to them. This idea, now rooted in our minds, reflects the status of women throughout history. However, these speculations fall short of objective gender relations.

18. Françoise Héritier, *Masculin/Féminin II. Dissoudre la hiérarchie*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2002.

### The demand for equal status between men and women

Feminism is a body of political, philosophical and social ideas geared to promoting the rights and interests of women in civil society. Feminist thought aims in particular to improve the status of women in societies where gender inequalities are traditional. Feminism strives to build new social relations and develops tools for the protection of women's rights and advances achieved. This movement is underpinned by various sociological and philosophical theories.

In addition, feminism is a militant movement that aims to increase women's role and rights in society. Based on social, political and philosophical considerations and devoted to women's rights in society, this movement is part of women's wider demands for gender equality. It takes its inspiration from the Feminist Call for Equality made in March 1898 in Marguerite Durand's *La Fronde*,<sup>19</sup> which did not really trigger, but participated in, the women's liberation movement.

In fact, the term 'feminism' does not refer to a homogeneous group, nor does it support absolute femininity. It is by opting for plurality and by rejecting de-essentialization that feminist movements are likely to bring about change. In any case, there are not one but several strands of feminism, numerous and diverse in their approaches. While feminists can pride themselves on having completely shaken the world's long-standing benchmarks in order to achieve previously unimaginable advances<sup>20</sup> such as the right to vote, the right to education and the right to take part in political activities, there is still much to be done. For that reason, the feminist struggle is still very much alive and grievances are aired constantly. What happened to unleash such strong passions about the status of women? What has produced such a passionate commitment, galvanizing its supporters so strongly into demanding an improvement in the lot of women?

Until the rise of the feminist movements, following the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's book in 1949,<sup>21</sup> the issue of the bases of gender difference was considered more or less to be a straightforward one. It was women, therefore, who set milestones for the feminist struggle. This philosophico-political ideology broke new ground and has since been a force to be reckoned with in political thought. Feminist schools of thought are as numerous as they are diverse. This study is based on feminist proponents of Anglo-American,<sup>22</sup> French, German and French Canadian philosophy. They generally belong to distinct, quite well-known and widespread schools of thought that use different strategies in pursuing the same goal, of full recognition of a woman's ability to succeed in all areas of political life.

19. The newspaper *La Fronde* was founded by Marguerite Durand on 6 March 1898.

20. Olympe de Gouge's declaration of women's and citizens' rights (1791) was one of the first formulations of feminist demands, based on feminist ideas developed in the eighteenth century. Closely modelled on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, this publication has never been adopted formally or put to the vote. It is in itself, therefore, incontrovertible proof of the difficulties inherent in women's struggle for liberation.

21. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* [1949], London, Cape, 2009.

22. In particular, the trends set by Allison Jaggar in 1983 and Rosemary Tong in 1988.



The first such school of thought was liberal. Liberal feminism calls for women's involvement in furtherance of the principles of liberal democracy. The liberal feminists demanded that women be given those democratically acknowledged rights which, under the influence of outmoded preconceptions, reducible to cultural, historical and psychological determinations, excluded women from the public sphere. Athenian democracy in ancient Greece was the very antithesis of the liberal trend. As a contrast to this reference to ancient Greek democracy, reference may be made to more recent authors, notably John Stuart Mill or Geneviève Fraisse,<sup>23</sup> who considered that the right to vote, theretofore the sole privilege of men, and the right of access to education on an equal footing with men must be granted to women, too. Liberal feminism sets great store by the values of liberal democracy and demands that liberal democracy be consistent with its own principles.

23. Geneviève Fraisse, *La raison des femmes*, Paris, Plon, 'Essais' Collection, 1992.

From this point of view, the same demand can be theoretically extended to all social classes. The question that then arises is: what does liberal feminism imply in terms of its social demands?

The difficulty that seems to emerge can obviously be confined to a distinctive feature of the political players, the promotion of specific gender-based identities. This approach could basically be a threat to democracy aimed at the application of universalism in its axiological neutrality. In addition to liberal feminism, there is yet another trend: Marxist feminism. Marxist feminists radically question the autonomy of political activity. Their originality lies in the political arena, seen as the locus of social existence. Indeed, industrial capitalism flourished because of control exerted over the domestic sphere by devaluing the traditional cottage industries by holding the 'bourgeois' lifestyle up as an ideal and by promoting at every turn the opinion of the experts (doctors, educators and social services) rather than common sense and the transmission of knowledge within the family. Women's activities, in particular, were annexed in this way, and women, confined to their homes, lost most of their influence in the public arena, an influence gained by engaging in activities outside

the home (shopping daily for fresh produce, providing the daily meal and attending to the children's education) and by mixing with other social classes and domesticity in urban districts.

Marxist feminists thus gave new positive meaning to social relations, as they aimed to organize the class struggle and considered that the division of society into classes had resulted in various forms of domination. A classless society would be ideal and would put an end to the notion of class and the oppression of women. That view, which emerged with Marx, has long fuelled the political debate. Obviously, it declined with the demise of Marxism and was ultimately absorbed by ordinary claims relating to human rights generally.

In radical feminism, the third school of thought, which arose from the liberation movements of the 1960s, women were considered to be the most oppressed group in the history of humanity. Voices were raised in protest against such oppression and in legitimate defence of women's rights to violent protest. Andrea Dworkin argued that men were naturally drawn towards death, unlike women, who constantly affirmed the value of life. The movement was thus an extreme version of the feminist struggle. This aggressive aspect must not, however, obscure the essential feature of the struggle, which can be summed up as the determination to promote all that profoundly concern women. The common denominator of the various trends is their criticism of democracy, which, in some respects, tramples its own emancipatory projects underfoot. In their protests and demands for a better quality of life, all feminist schools of thought struggle to reinstate the very goal of democracy.

### The demand for gender neutrality in a democracy

'Having examined this view (that women are less intelligent than men), in accordance with the rule for establishing truth, which is to admit as true only that which is based on clear and distinct ideas, on the one hand, such a view appears false and rooted in prejudice and popular tradition, on the other, the two sexes are found to be equal ... women are as noble, as perfect and as able as men.'<sup>24</sup> In response to Poulain de la Barre, this idea encapsulates the feminist struggle as a whole. As diverse as they appear, all feminists have one common demand: the reassessment of women, which is indispensable to the implementation of the blueprint for democracy. They stress, in particular, that the human rights linked to the idea of democracy are universal. Paradoxically, the blueprint for democracy, portrayed as revolutionary and, above all, as a source of optimism for the status of women, has been rejected by some feminist groups. Susan Moller Okin, for example, considers that, owing to its emphasis on religious, ethical and other specificities, multiculturalism results in women's rights not being acknowledged in each particular group.

She gives the example of polygamy in France (the same France that is the prototype of representational democracy). Polygamy is tolerated there in the case of some groups (authorization to come to France with several wives wedded in a country where polygamy is allowed), which implies that women may not protest against polygamy within their own group.

Admittedly, Moller Okin's target is multiculturalism and not democracy, but her claim is basically consistent with the idea that democracy is a system of government, while the burgeoning of multiculturalism betrays its aspiration towards universality by feeding on the silence of women.<sup>25</sup> She examines the unfairness to which women had been subject in both the public and the private spheres and thus portrays democracy as simply reflecting

24. François Poulain de La Barre, *op. cit.* p. 10.

25. Susan Moller Okin (1946–2004), *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, New York, Basic Books, 1989. In Moller Okin's opinion, a view of women that reduces them to their natural and social role and is reinforced by prejudice, based on hierarchy and posits male superiority can only lead to the conclusion that existence within the family determines and encompasses all that can be said about women. This traditional approach is a straitjacket for women and reduces them to their function as progenitors of new citizens and guardians of the home.

the political marginalization to which women have been conditioned for centuries. Feminists of the radical persuasion, such as Moller Okin herself, think that democracy is paradoxical because it fosters the non-participatory participation of women.

In truth, representative democracy was portrayed in feminist political theories as the manifestation of the phallogratization of the public arena, even though it aspired to universality. Such universality, apparent in name only, signalled the gradual demise of democracy. Consequently, the new drive for democracy, aimed at securing widespread and authentic participation by womankind merely veils while revealing an age-old social defect, giving expression to a heavily disguised conservatism sustained by a yearning for the glorious past of male domination over women. The signs are unmistakable for, according to feminists, it is difficult for men to relinquish their domination, their so-called supremacy, as borne out by the vague and evasive answers to the question of whether gender neutrality is compatible with the idea of positive discrimination. The rationale for positive discrimination seems to reveal and build awareness of some weakness in women, which is obviously a historical, socio-cultural and political fallacy. In fact, discrimination in any form is esteem-enhancing in appearance only, especially if it attempts to make amends by creating other injustices. The idea of a quota of women in parliaments and in politics generally thus speaks for itself. Positive discrimination throws into relief the hybrid situation of women as the democratization of social relations, underpinned by universality, continues apace.

In its bid to universalize, representative democracy has theoretically excluded gender specificity and gender difference when determining the value of the person in politics. Feminists therefore consider that it has set the stage for the hijacking of politics in an operation orchestrated by men intent on overwhelming women through gender caricature. Is universality, then, no more than a front basically calling into question the value of the blueprint for democracy itself? The feminists' conceptual position remains one of ameliorative criticism of the democratic system to make it more consistent

with its basic principles, insofar as there is no better alternative at the moment and it holds out the promise of a better quality of community life. Women's demand for a political identity, the keynote of this study, is, according to some feminist political theories, caught up in the infernal cogs of the apparatus of representative democracy, which precludes further progress. How should the demand for a political identity be understood in a democratic context?

In feminist thought, the perception of the female subject has long led to the division of social and political life into a domestic and a public sphere, which is to be blamed for men's domination of women and seriously diminishes the effectiveness of democracy. Steps must be taken to ensure that the public sphere is no longer based on a contract that, far from being social, is more like a cosy arrangement between men for men. Feminists, generally attached to democratic principles, have been keen to have them extended to womankind and have succeeded to some extent. Democratic principles are still of symbolic value to women, for they are still in purely political terms akin to wishful thinking.

Ideally, in a purely democratic context, equality should be created without taking gender specificity into account. However, such an approach would inevitably keep one category in a state of minority. The statistical data on women's participation in politics in Africa, for example, are eloquent proof of this. It is certainly true that the feminist struggle in Africa is still far short of its goal, even though a timid change in mentalities is under way, as borne out by the presidential election in Liberia of the first female head of state in the continent, the inclusion in 2010 of a woman for the first time in the list of candidates for the post of President of the Republic in Côte d'Ivoire<sup>26</sup> and the increasingly obvious presence of women in parliaments. In the United Republic of Tanzania, President Jakaya Kikwete has appointed seven women to ministerial posts, including the ministries of finance, justice and education. Armando Guebuza, elected leader in Mozambique, has also included eight women ministers in his team, and there are five women in the new government of Sudan. The Kenyan Wangari Mathai

26. Ms Jacqueline Lohes Oble.

was the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. To maintain the momentum, United Nations Resolution 1325 on the representation of women in decision-making bodies calls for a 30 per cent quota of women at all decision-making levels. Here, too, the issue of imposing quotas for the participation of women in politics raises the question of whether the idea of demanding gender neutrality in a democracy is meaningful at all. In any case, concern that women should play a full part as citizens and not be kept fully apart marks the beginning of a change in mentalities.

There can no longer be any doubt that women in the continent have well and truly laid siege to the political field. 'Neither sisters nor wives, the new women leaders are strong personalities who have won their place at the top after a hard struggle.'<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, according to the same magazine, in South Africa, Mozambique, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania, for more than 30 per cent of members of parliament are women; in sub-Saharan Africa, the figure is 16.4 per cent; while the average in Europe is 19 per cent and 16.9 per cent in Scandinavian countries.<sup>28</sup> There is no doubt that a great deal is being done so that women may participate meaningfully in politics. Their increased power almost amounts to a revolution compared to the frustration that they experienced for centuries. Even so, figures quoted by *Jeune Afrique* and the international community's efforts are but a drop in the ocean. Indeed, after the hopes raised by the winds of democratic change in the 1990s, disappointment still runs deep. Nothing has changed substantially, either economically or socially. Corruption, impoverishment, economic and political crises and civil wars are all part of the fabric of everyday life. In this gloom-ridden atmosphere, political power is associated with men. Male supremacy in democratic politics is a constant, even if efforts are being made to promote women.

In the formulation of policies, a person must no longer be viewed as a sexual being endowed with a specific set of characteristics. If policies are to be formulated in terms of specific sexual determinations, a person whose distinctiveness is gender-specific becomes a hindrance and a problem. The standard is to make an abstraction of particular

27. *Jeune Afrique*, No. 2356, 5–11 March 2006, pp. 30–31.

28. *Ibidem*.

gender-specific determinations in the democratic process, precisely in order to comply strictly with the very spirit of democracy, as the locus ideal for the expression of axiological neutrality. A whole range of problems emerge, however, when neutrality is applied fairly and equally. Finally, in practice, democracy in a purely African context is perhaps biased, albeit unintentionally, towards the men insofar as the gender of politicians and, by extension, of democracy in Africa is still, unfortunately, masculine – to the detriment of all the efforts made.

The question of gender identity, first raised in the ranks of liberal feminism in the 1970s and still a relevant issue today, will now be considered. Is one a woman or does one become one? In the issue of gender identity, formalized by contemporary feminist thinkers, including Susan Moller Okin, and instigated by Simone de Beauvoir, the importance of gender is a purely social construct. The truth of the matter is that women are not born women. They become women, which entails identifying with the roles traditionally and culturally assigned to women by society. It is a state of mind that consists in taking pleasure in one's situation as a woman, a situation determined by physical and intellectual weakness. An essential difference can be asserted only by negating the self, which implies that women's claim to be subjects of law inevitably involves negation of their womanhood. Abandoning one's situation as a woman, frustrated by cultural determination, does not mean that one becomes a man, but that one becomes self-aware as a political being, destined to engage in political activity, with the slogan 'existing together, becoming together' as a guarantee of the positive perpetuation of the human race.

### Conclusion

Women's struggles and demands in all areas of socio-political life are geared to ensuring that democracy achieves its goal. The specific nature of democracy as the counterweight to the domestication of women has therefore been revealed, as democracy is genderless

in its very essence. This is the nub of the basic issue that undermines and torments every woman and every feminist school of thought, how one can claim specificity and be part of democratic universalism and concomitantly reduce, if not end altogether, male domination in furtherance of global and gender-neutral participation in the development of humanity. To address this concern, democracy must practise what it preaches, with emphasis on the need for consistency between its principles, its essence and women's social reality, which it is supposed to improve. If democracy is to be universal and to promote fairness and equality, then it may not exclude women. To do so would be worse than paradoxical, it would be a contradiction. Participatory democracy is therefore a genuine boon for the political integration of women.

Lastly, reflection on democracy entails reflection on ability and not on gender categorization. It entails acknowledgement of knowledge and life skills, two qualities ingrained in people, meaning both men and women, gender-neutral people, whose neutrality is wholly geared to increasing the power of democracy, defined etymologically as the power of the people, by the people and for the people. The struggle for social gender equality is still relevant to the quest for a holistic understanding of economics, culture or politics. In fact, it could be argued that it is still under construction, even if there is a general, albeit a fallacious line of thought which asserts that the word 'feminism' is only a code used to give standing to narrow concerns relating to women's specific interests only. In a bid to correct this misguided perception and open up new avenues of thought on the issues of protest and demands on behalf of women, innovative critical approaches must be taken into order to help to eliminate stereotypes and to widen the categories within which women are classified. Even today, such a classification places women outside the democratic process and thwarts their self-fulfilment. The question of whether social equality suffices still remains. The problem lies entirely at this level – as social equality is readily achieved by neutral subjects, the problem is what equality still means when differences, especially gender differences, come into play.



## Hélène XILAKIS

Government is not made in virtue of natural rights, which may and do exist in total independence of it, and exist in much greater clearness and in a much greater degree of abstract perfection; but their abstract perfection is their practical defect. By having a right to everything they want everything.<sup>1</sup>

1. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 1790.

Edmund Burke's criticism and refutation of the 'rights of man' in the name of practice and politics sparked a great debate in the years following the French Revolution from 1789 to 1800. His *Reflections on the Revolution in France* fomented controversy in European intellectual circles, especially in Germany, England and France, and even called the very principles of human rights into question.

In the twentieth century, some lawyers adopted Burke's argument on metaphysics and practice, and they, too, in the name of positivism reject human rights as empty rights. How have the natural-law premises of such rights been refuted in the name of practice? How has the dividing line been drawn between the philosophy of human rights and modern political theory?

It is interesting to observe the historical turning point in the concept of the 'rights of man', the changes that it underwent over time, the way in which Enlightenment philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and so many others espoused and individualized Aristotelian natural law to bequeath a subjective human right, the way in which classical natural law has been subjectivized and the way in which the nascent 'right of man' was founded on the same premise as its predecessor, human nature, but has since been geared to view human beings as members of civil society, as homo politicus – all issues that were not satisfactorily resolved in Burke's opinion.

On what do human rights rest? In the Aristotelian natural-law tradition, the rights of human beings are generally prescribed by human nature, common to all beings in space and time,

which raises the question of how such prescriptions can be 'read'. The answer, according to that same tradition, is that principles must be deduced by observation and theoretical analysis to be applied to the social life of the natural being. The Enlightenment philosophers, however, took up that thought and included it in their contract theories, thus propounding the 'rights of man'.

The Enlightenment marked the advent of rational thought, which was instrumental in freeing human beings from all absolutism and abuse of power. Human beings began to be treated individually and not merely as members of a community or of a generalized human species. Such subjectivization applied to the contemporary conception of rights, and contract theorists propounded the 'rights of man'. It was precisely such arbitrary subjectivization, wholly contrary to human nature, in Burke's opinion, that marked the beginning of the disaster of revolutionary France, a disaster potentially contagious to other European countries.<sup>2</sup>

In his criticism of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, Burke highlighted the abstraction through which they were rendered 'universal'. The abstraction of such a concept was quite possible, it could even be perfect, but he considered it to be metaphysical and therefore incapable of materialization in human reality.

To his mind, the 'rights of man' disregarded all examples of antiquity, all precedents, charters and acts of parliament. Owing to the abstraction, those theories were as valid against a beneficent authority as against the most violent tyranny. They were always at issue with governments, not on a question of abuse, but a question of competency, a question of title. They were so general, as far as conditions and time were concerned, that they could not be natural or effective or even adequate.<sup>3</sup> A theory to be put into practice, in which the practice itself is a kind of theory – such an operation was doomed from the outset.

2. Regina Wecker, *Geschichte und Geschichtsverständnis bei Edmund Burke*, Bern, Peter Lang AG, 1981, p. 111.

3. Edmund Burke, *op. cit.*

The 'rights of man' were therefore expected to have a defect; those rights are in fact worth naught. Such rights do not relate to human beings, but to the abstract and general idea of a human being; they are perhaps metaphysically true, but in reality they are simply false and misleading. It is impossible, according to Edmund Burke, to attribute a general right to an idea of an eternal and universal person for, as he himself said, he was a politician and then a practitioner.

Owing to their theoretical perfection, rights are doomed to be inadequate. Edmund Burke considered that the entire political system proposed by the French was unfeasible, impracticable. The establishment of a democracy anew, without taking the country's history and the differences, and even the natural inequality, among people into account, could only lead France to its ruin.

He did not deny, however, all rights that flowed from the natural rights of man, but he viewed those rights differently, more along the lines of a natural medieval right.<sup>4</sup> Burke therefore drew a distinction between the 'real rights of men' and the 'rights of man' declared by the Constituent Assembly, which was somewhat akin to the reservations expressed by classical philosophers about democracy: all people have the 'right' to good government but, as they are unequal in ability, government is more likely to be in the hands of a 'true natural aristocracy'.<sup>5</sup> Burke accepted natural human rights in the state of nature. He considered human rights to be natural law transposed into civil society and achieved arbitrarily for, as tradition and heritage are natural things and therefore good for civil society, human rights are conversely unnatural and therefore harmful. Diametrically opposed to contract theories, he considered the rights of man to be artificial, alien to civil society, an arena in which theory and the metaphysics of those rights are out of place. Civil society is the place for politics and practice.

4. Bertrand Binoche and Jean-Pierre Cléro, *Bentham contre les droits de l'homme*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2007, p. 139.

5. *Edmund Burke, op. cit.*

Moreover, it is the principle of abstraction that has served as a model for all subsequent criticisms. As noted by Bertrand Binoche, Burke laid 'a new foundation, in the metaphysical sense of the word, in relation to which the Revolution stands as an abstraction: in the opinion of Bentham and Hegel, Maistre and Constant, the Revolution was an apparently senseless undertaking that claimed to make an abstraction of the continuity that defines the reality of nations as they exist irreducibly in time.'<sup>6</sup>

The debate between Burke, his followers and his opponents is a very fruitful area of study that could reveal original forms of meaning that could be ascribed to the text of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen and the philosophical principles that underpinned the French Revolution.

6. Bertrand Binoche and Jean-Pierre Cléo, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

### Identity and otherness

Does philosophy exist outside 'our' tradition? This is not merely an academic or theoretical question: does not the possibility of peaceful, global living together depend on a new way of thinking about our relationship with 'others' as well as with other 'philosophies'? This question is the basis for a new variation of philosophical thinking, using a set of theories and practices defined as 'multiculturalism', 'comparative philosophy', 'cross-cultural philosophy' or 'intercultural philosophy'.

In today's globalized and multi-ethnic world, the requirement for philosophers to think in a less self-referential and ethnocentric way has become an ethical duty, designed to avoid colonialist attitudes. It is forced to offer its universalist aims for discussion with a view to formulating anew the very concept of the universal, which we would define as the universal in situation, or universality in context.

When philosophy is open to dialogue with other traditions of thought, it shows a multi-voiced and multifaceted nature which is not confined by the overly rigid parameters of the system. Liminal philosophy that is on the edge, often in the most literal sense of the word, takes the shape of a wide variety of modalities which cannot be enclosed in a single-voiced definition. Different terms may designate this philosophical expression that is both old and new: 'multiculturalist philosophy', 'comparative philosophy', 'intercultural philosophy'. Choosing between the terms is by no means a simple terminological exercise but reflects different concepts of the relationship this kind of philosophy has with 'other philosophies',<sup>1</sup> and with such concepts as 'identity', 'culture', 'universality', 'reason' and 'dialogue', to name but a few, and does certainly not involve making a value judgement. It is a hard choice in part because the differences between the terms are not clearly defined. The use of one or the other definition does not depend so much on the preference of the thinker as on the possibility

1. The definition of 'other philosophies' used here might be accused of being ethnocentric, as it implies that Western philosophy is the only reference. The question of terminology is one of the most problematic pitfalls in 'our' approach to intercultural dialogue. The lack of adequate terms often obliges to use words that are inappropriate, marked by the sign of the Identical, the partial nature of which we shall at least try to place in context here.

of dialogue between 'horizons of meaning' belonging to different cultural traditions which had the opportunity of encountering each other in practice or virtually, in our 'global' world: it reflects the linguistic and cultural setting in which the debate is taking place. If, for example, the term multiculturalism<sup>2</sup> is the most widespread in the English-speaking world, the Spanish-language area refers to *interculturalidad*. This choice is not only epistemological, but also ethical.

According to Irigaray's suggestions concerning the relationship between 'Me' and 'You', a relationship, so as not to exhaust 'the other' in it, must acknowledge the space separating them to be inalienable, which means not reducing the other to one's self. In this perspective, it seems to me important to emphasize the opening to concrete dialogue with the different 'non-Western' traditions to which philosophical thought should now lay claim.

Given the extreme linguistic confusion and the superposition of different interpretations that characterize reflection on the relationship between cultures, I propose to give here several clear (but I must emphasize arbitrary) definitions of them.

### Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism defines a given situation: the coexistence of several cultures in a single society and consequently a single school or work environment. It does not only indicate the recognition of cultural differences of communities which exist together in the same space, but also provides a new vision of relations between the state and cultural and ethnic minorities, new in relation to the traditional concept of liberal democrat culture in that very context.

In fact, as stated by Léonie Sandercock,<sup>3</sup> the ideology of multiculturalism may take many different shapes and forms but it underpins nevertheless a liberal response to constitutions marked by ethnocentrism which sometimes can even hide forms of (genuine) racism. The term 'multiculturalism' emerged in Canada at the end of the 1960s and described

2. It is worth noting that the tensions and questions relating to multiculturalism are considered to be the prerogative of 'Western' societies which today play host within their own borders to different ethnic groups. In analyses that challenge these 'multicultural' societies, mention is rarely made of the fact that this status also describes other societies, such as societies in South and South-East Asia (India, Malaysia and Indonesia, to name but a few).

3. Léonie Sandercock, *Cosmopolis II: Mongrel Cities in the XXIst Century*, London, Continuum, 2003.

the 'silent revolution' of French Canadians, who form a minority in Canada but a majority in the province of Québec. One of their main objectives was the demand for state institutions to be bilingual, and for biculturalism in schools, which meant a separate *curriculum* for French-speakers differing from the *curriculum* for Anglo-Canadians. What we see here is the demand put forward by those (the French-speakers) who were aiming for the radical separation of the two communities, which implies renegotiating the conditions of 'living together' whereby in fact the French-speaking minority would coexist alongside and not with the English-speaking community. In other cases, multiculturalism has dictated a policy line that aims to ensure social cohesion without trying to achieve cultural symmetry between the various cultural and ethnic groups, but recognizes and defends the cultural practices of minorities.

### Comparative or cross-cultural philosophy

By 'comparative' or 'cross-cultural' philosophy we mean on the other hand a variation of philosophy that extends to a comparative study of the world's different philosophical traditions. Some people do consider it to be a 'new practice', but it can also be seen as 'broadening' to new contexts practices already established within the history of philosophy. It gives free rein to many methods of enquiry as it is based on a comparison of elements and theories that vary greatly in time and space.

The connection it establishes with the themes and particularly the practices of multiculturalism and the intercultural is equally varied. It is interpreted by some authors to be a tool for understanding and dialogue with 'the other' by opening up to an ethical, moral and political dimension. It is interpreted by others as a tool for theoretical enquiry, limited to a comparison within the bounds of philosophy and not venturing onto the terrain of, for example, anthropology (for the study of 'cultures') and even less that of ethics or politics. Accordingly however, the reflection that is generated by cross-cultural philosophy shares spaces and themes not only with theories of multiculturalism but also with those of interculturalism.

## Interculturalism

Interculturalism for its part describes a specific 'project' for interaction within a multicultural society. It argues the need for dialogue between different cultures through relations between linguistics, ethnic and religious communities, so as to establish greater mutual understanding. Thus, in a global setting, intercultural philosophy relies on a new formulation of the traditional categories of Western philosophical thinking, by which we mean one possible philosophical tradition among others, with which it is called upon to establish in contemporaneousness a joint dialogue that could lead to the end of practices of cultural domination.

## Philosophy and multiculturalism

Rather than representing a new or renewed variation of philosophical thinking, multiculturalism presents itself from the outset as a political and social debate in which useful critiques and perspectives are developed which also cover the field of philosophy. Multiculturalism is then a 'de facto reality', which compels a thorough reworking of political, ethical, social, educational and other categories and practices in common use in what are known as the 'Western' nations.

The term 'multiculturalism' indicates in fact the coexistence in one national space of 'cultures'<sup>4</sup> that have emerged in different territorial, political and linguistic contexts.<sup>5</sup> Philosophical reflection must then take place on the new configuration of societies that are now structured in the plural, and which require taking a stand that is not only theoretical but also capable of resulting in decisive practices. For example, noting the illusory nature of the American myth of the melting pot, which has become in fact a salad bowl, has determined the need to reformulate research perspectives on multiculturalism so as to provide responses to the many questions of a theoretical and practical nature which beset numerous aspects of political and social living.

4. This word is placed in inverted commas here because it requires further discussion, which will be conducted below.

5. As Adrian Favell and Tariq Modood ('The philosophy of multiculturalism', in *Contemporary Political Philosophy. A Reader and a Guide*, Edinburgh University Press, 2003) so aptly note: 'What in Britain is called multiculturalism (for example, the provision of halal meat in hospitals or the marking of Diwali by a school holiday), Kymlicka calls "polyethnicity" (Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, Oxford University Press, 1995). British "polyethnicity" is a legacy of empire; most migrants came from states that had been incorporated into the British Empire ... and contributed to Britain's economic development and to its superpower status; some migrants were ex-servicemen, with many others having relatives who had risked or given their lives for Britain.'



The basic issue at the root of the demands made by multiculturalism – which in this respect shares the objectives of feminism – is the recognition of one's own identity, both collective and individual. Serious charges of ethnocentrism are made against 'Western' societies (including American society) in the name of respect for the different cultural identities which constitute them and have been overlooked for too long and consequently relegated de facto to a subordinate status. What is up for discussion, precisely in a society which is fulfilled and understood by virtue of its multi-ethnic connotation, is the neutrality not only of its policies, but also of the very theories on which the supposedly universal value of its achievements rests. It means, for instance, introducing multicultural curricula into school and university education in order to relativize the presumption that what is known as 'Western thought' is superior or universal.

### Critical analysis of multiculturalism

Framed in these terms, the debate between supporters of a multicultural approach and defenders of the universal nature of 'Western thought' takes the form of a conflict between cultural relativism and cultural universalism which, for each of these positions, seems fated to make it impossible to establish genuine dialogue that does not elide their respective differences. On the one hand, seeing difference as a radical separation makes it hard to discover the universal traits that might allow mutual understanding. On the other, proclaiming a single model as absolute means at the same time refusing different cultures the possibility of making their own contribution to the growth of human thought and of having equal dignity of expression, thereby contravening the very democratic values that the liberal West considers to be absolutely essential. While relativism keeps alive the differences between interlocutors but is not open to dialogue, universalism does not allow differences to exist and be expressed, and thereby makes monologue absolute as the only spoken voice.

What is the basic problem with multiculturalism? What prevents solutions from being found? A vision that tries to make the concept of 'culture' absolute and crystallized,

in particular when it is used in respect of 'non-Western' realities, is seen to be a monolithic entity that is not particularly susceptible to transformation. This vision, which does not acknowledge historic contextualization, has met with much success not only among 'Western' thinkers' but also in some theories and political phenomena on an international scale such as, for example, in the polemic about what are called 'Asian values'. We mean by this that cultural clashes, which these days increasingly exacerbate conflict, are not so much determined by a sort of cultural Darwinism in which different perspectives are forced to compete with each other, as by the radicalization of the reasons for the differences, thus determining the predicted conflict scenario.

On the contrary, action must be taken to introduce dynamics of dialogue and confrontation between different cultures that might drive consequent policies.

In short, although we have experienced in the twentieth century the general upheaval of an age-old monologue tradition, we have endeavoured to respond in different ways in relation to the paradigm from which we start, whether cultural or not. Given the fact that the responses have taken the form of the philosophy of multiculturalism, comparative philosophy, and lastly intercultural philosophy (of which there are many particularly significant authoritative authors, including Jullien, Nussbaum, Panikkar, Fornet-Betancourt and Bhabha), we consider that philosophy should be a factor in the meeting of cultures as a translation not only of concepts but also of 'strategies of meaning', in the words of François Jullien, from one linguistic context to the next, one range of meaning to another but above all as ethical reflection. Polyphonic and multilingual intercultural philosophy, as an ethical project, is likely to influence all philosophical research, by giving new plural articulation to its forms, methodologies and assumptions.

The result is a form of thought that takes the form of a practice or, as Panikkar has stated, a 'dialogue in dialogue', a key tool of intercultural philosophy, which requires a mutual destructuring of interlocutors, but must however be followed by the reconstruction of a language and methodological process that would be equally comprehensible to all parties.

## Giulia SISSA

The School of Athens is in Rome. It portrays a grandiose interior, in the classical style: philosophers are talking, listening or deep in thought; mathematicians are proving their theorems; painters and poets are gazing into the distance. In 1509, Raphael painted a vast fresco structured around Plato and Aristotle, the school's founders, as well as around a figure clad in a short robe, seated uncomfortably on the steps and holding a cup. The figure is possibly Socrates.<sup>1</sup> They are surrounded by the great men of Greek, Arab and Christian thought: assembled in a single location, where historical time has been negated: a gathering of the pupils of Athena. And yet, on the left, we see a smooth, unbearded face, a gaze turned outwards to the painting's observer and a white garment: Hypatia. There is perhaps, then, a woman among the philosophers, a woman who thinks.

The School of Athens is in Paris. This time in the flesh, and consisting of a group of historians and anthropologists, students of the ancient world, whose ambition it is to put the study of that world on a new footing. The time is the 1970s. They, too, include founders, with an entire gravitational field extending outwards from them. They, too, include a woman, whose thinking commands attention, and who speaks with an increasingly unique voice: Nicole Loraux.

A woman, a style of thinking. A craft. Not the craft of Zeus, that notorious weaver, but the craft of the intelligence at work.

First, a vast body of work completed. Nicole Loraux wrote book upon book, starting with her doctoral thesis, which she defended in 1977 (*Athènes imaginaire. Histoire de l'oraison funèbre athénienne et de sa fonction dans la cité classique*), which became *L'Invention d'Athènes. Histoire de l'oraison funèbre dans la 'cité classique'*, Paris, E.H.E.S.S., 1980; Mouton, 1981, Payot, 1993 [*The Invention of Athens. The funeral oration in the classical city*, Harvard U.P., 1986]. Then came *Les Enfants d'Athéna. Idées athéniennes sur la citoyenneté*

1. Daniel Orth Bell, « New Identifications in Raphael's School of Athens », *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 77, No. 4, Dec. 1995, pp. 638–646.

*et la division des sexes*, Paris, La Découverte, 1981 [*The Children of Athena. Athenian ideas about citizenship and the division of the sexes*, Princeton U.P., 1993]; *Façons tragiques de tuer une femme*, Paris, Hachette, 1985 [*Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, Harvard U.P., 1987]; *Les Expériences de Tirésias. Le féminin et l'homme grec*, Paris, Gallimard, 1989 [*The Experiences of Tiresias. The feminine and the Greek man*, Princeton U.P., 1995]; *Les Mères en deuil*, Paris, Seuil, 1990 [*Mothers in Mourning*, Cornell U.P., 1998]; *Né de la terre. Mythe et politique à Athènes*, Paris, Seuil, 1996 [*Born of the Earth. Myth and politics in Athens*, Cornell U.P., 2000]; *La Cité divisée. L'Oubli dans la mémoire d'Athènes*, Paris, Payot, 1997 [*The Divided City: on memory and forgetting in Ancient Athens*, Zone Books, New York, 2002]; *La Voix endeuillée. Essai sur la tragédie grecque*, Paris, Gallimard, 1999 (not translated). And on top of all that, articles and translations of Greek texts for the theatre, including Euripides' *Hécube* (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1999). The publications kept on coming, without a break.<sup>2</sup>

Then, a vast amount of work was completed. Nicole Loraux pioneered a new kind of research, the impact of which was felt not only in France, but more widely in Europe and in the United States; not only among classical scholars but among modernist historians, political theorists and psychoanalysts.

The chair Nicole Loraux held at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales was called the *Chair of History and Anthropology of the Greek City*. She ran an integrated research programme (IRP) at the school to begin with: 'Modern Uses of Antiquity', then, in 1994, became the head of a research centre: 'Histories, Temporalities and Turbulences'. The challenge she took up was that of maintaining the point of contact between anthropology and history, of never losing sight of the normal in the midst of disorder. What difference can a woman historian make, she would often ask, placing all the stress on the word 'woman'. What new perspectives, and for which aspects of the Greek city, could be opened up through the fact that one is a woman?

2. For a complete bibliography of Nicole Loraux's work, see: Ioanna Papadopoulou-Belmehdi, 'Hommage à Nicole Loraux (1943-2003). De l'humanisme à l'"âme de la cité"', *Kernos*, 16, 2003, pp. 9–16. For a critical overview of her work, see: Claudine Leduc, 'Dans les pas de Nicole Loraux', *EspacesTemps.net*, Actuel, 07.06.2005. For a collective response to her work, see: *EspacesTemps Les Cahiers / Clio, Histoire, Femmes et Sociétés*, 'Les voies traversières de Nicole Loraux. Une helléniste à la croisée des sciences sociales', No. 87/88, March 2005.

To reduce Nicole's work to its basic principles, I would say this: the difference between the sexes is never immaterial; such a difference is a division; as soon as we choose this difference / division as our vantage-point, without seeking to elide it, we have a good chance of picking up on other divisions in the social and political spheres. The political sphere is not the locus of the 'neutralization' of power, but a battlefield. Truces are agreed; one side wins, but without exterminating the conquered; the losing side bows its head before its conquerors, instead of rising up. Both sides talk, instead of killing each other. All that is perfectly true. And yet, in the public arena, there is endless conflict. Athens, the city that never ceased to interest Nicole and which still galvanizes us, was not simply a *polis*: it was a democracy. The power of the people – in its representations and self-praise, its excesses and ambivalences, its achievements and exclusions – was the result of a victory, and therefore of a conflict within the social body. The conflict was always there. For Nicole, this is what created the point of contact between anthropology (symbolic systems, the social imaginary, rituals, myths, theatre) and history, that is to say violence, dissension, upheaval. To refuse to give way on the point of contact meant 're-politicizing' a city which, had it become the exclusive preserve of anthropologists, would have run the risk of being frozen in a social taxonomy. Not to delude oneself about disorder, which generates the need for the law, meant emphasizing the point, a counter-intuitive one full of insight, that democratic activity consists in discord that is continually reactivated.<sup>3</sup>

3. On this point, Nicole Loraux's work converges with Luciano Canfora's, *Critica della retorica democratica*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2002; *La democrazia. Storia di un'ideologia*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2004.

For Nicole, fully aware of division through her own situation, it was necessary always to be mindful of everything that separates; starting from the historical nature of her work as a woman historian – in other words, conscious of the fact that working as a woman intellectual is the result of a very recent emancipation – meant refusing to dismiss the movement, which is always political in nature, that makes history. Her work never failed to move between historicity / conflict, on the one hand, and sexualization / exclusion of women, on the other. The opposition between sexual power and social power, the irremediable split that stubbornly persists, in spite of all the coordination, cooperation and consensus is something that should never be neglected. The ‘connections stemming from division’: this oxymoron conveys exactly the thrust of that project.

Power, it might be argued, can be understood without recourse to sexual difference. In fact, it is quite the reverse. When we make sexual difference the focus of our thinking about the political, it provides us with a heuristic model that makes our reflections more rigorous and less naive. We should not be too eager to claim that, now, all is well. It is this, in particular, that I learned from Nicole, what we all needed to learn from her, thanks to her craft, to all her to-ing and fro-ing between sexual and social division. And thanks to her refusal to paint a pretty picture.

There are many important issues, which cross discipline boundaries, and of which Nicole’s thinking gives us a clearer picture. So let us take a brief look at how the perspectives she opened up help to give us a better understanding of the sexualization of the political and of the virilization of philosophy, both of which, nonetheless, transcend dichotomies.

### The sexuation of the political

If we wish to understand politics, the politics of the ancient world to start with, the question of sex is all-important. Not that we need to take an interest in gender as well; or that we need to give particular attention to women, also. In 'sexual difference', the more important word is 'difference'. Difference comes into play in a society the moment men are moulded and their fields of action mapped out – fields which must remain forbidden territory to women. In a society deeply marked by war, gender is paramount, so much so that it provides the basis for citizenship.

To see Athens with Nicole as our guide is immediately to home in on this foundational exclusion. Athenians tell themselves as a nation, both in words and in pictures, that they were 'sprung from the soil'. The advantages of autochthony, the political myth par excellence, lie in the fantasy of an indigenous origin that is pure and independent of the female body. Born from the earth, Athenians have two mothers, Earth and the Virgin Athena, but neither of these mothers is a woman. It is a myth and it is absurd, but that is its beauty: the political imaginary moulds a collective family novel, in which the children of the fatherland can find cause for self-satisfaction: equality, fraternity and virility. Nicole came to study the myth of autochthony through her work on the Athenian imaginary (*The Invention of Athens*): a hagiographic self-representation of the whole city, contained in the funeral orations delivered at the public funerals of those who had died in war.

In these ceremonial speeches, local history had to appear in a perfectly consistent form: as heroic and triumphant, from the start. A start that had to reach right back to a time immemorial that was memorable, and bear the stamp of a noble, excellent and impeccable identity. We are alone among the Hellenes in not having conquered through violence the soil of others; we have not been born from human bodies,

which move and migrate from their native soil and settle somewhere else; we have grown here, from the furrows of this soil that never moves. The evocation of this extra-uterine, spontaneous generation contributes, in short, to the effectiveness of the orator's words, which are supposed to create the cohesion of the civic body.

Patriotic eloquence; and in this eloquence, the arguments which demand the exclusion of women (their silence; their complete subjugation by the Athenian male); then, the division of the sexes, located as a result at the very centre of civic ideology; the division of the social body, both in its extreme version, as the *stasis*, and in the ordinary exercise of power by the people, which is never unanimous, since the *dêmos* is satisfied with a majority, to which a minority will always be opposed; the grandiose counterpoint of tragedy, the locus of the representation of society, and yet, in spite of that, an antipolitical enactment of the grief and the passions of women. This, then, was Nicole's intellectual odyssey.

So, citizens are men. Nicole takes this obvious fact as her starting point to untangle the rationalizations. Men are born from the earth, because they must remain untainted by any association with the feminine. But why, exactly, must the citizens be men? Why is it that this society needs to tell itself such a story? It is now up to us, thirty years after *The Children of Athena*, to try and come up with an answer. Instead of begging the question about the asymmetry of all social constructions of sexual difference, we must take a closer look at the reasons of the Athenians. We must explore more fully the connection between war, citizenship and democracy: a genuinely causal chain that leads to new insights into the sexed body, into the sexed nature of the political animal and into the characteristics of this sexed animal. These insights are quite distinct from the rhetoric of self-praise, but their logic uncovers for us what lies behind the rhetoric. Let us call these insights a political culture.



Citizens are men. In ancient societies (and Athens is no exception), the distinctive feature of their gender is their vocation for war, their fighting skills, their ability to take command, and consequently to govern, including collectively. Whatever our interest in the life of these societies, we must always take masculinity as our starting point, and its inscription in warfare. The exclusion of women then immediately appears not only a consequence but also the necessary condition of political competence, which is an extension and a confirmation of a prior military competence. The greater the number of men in power, and the closer the coincidence in each individual case between fighting and governing, the more effectively will women be excluded.

The power of the people has never been neutral, asexual or bisexual. To be properly understood, this power must be seen not only in its masculine but in its positively anti-feminine dimension. We have to appreciate the full importance of the fact that, in ancient Greece, democracy emerged as self-government by a group of warriors/citizens, endowed with a character and physique that could only be male – and who could not afford to trifle with femininity, because, since Homeric times, femininity had meant pusillanimity. Violence and virility go hand in hand. The Greeks used the word *andreia* for both, the Romans would use *virtus* to express the excellence of the *aner* and the *vir*. Women are physiologically placid, feckless and cowardly. The polarity is one of strength and weakness but of aggressiveness and listlessness.

It is Aristotle who provides us with a key to the historical nature of sexed power among the Greeks. Aristotle asserts that monarchical regimes come to an end when there is a sufficient number of warriors who cease to tolerate the despotism of a sovereign and seize power. Self-government by the masses in the *politeiai*, the 'cities of citizens', (from which democracies are a deviation) is dependent on a critical mass of hoplites, who decide to take control of the city themselves. All of these political actors are indeed excellent, in at least one respect: their great courage in battle.

When the masses govern the state with a view to the common interest, the name used for this species is the generic name common to all constitutions – the name of ‘Polity’. There is a good reason for the usage. It is possible for one man, or a few, to be of outstanding excellence; but when it comes to a large number, we can hardly expect a fine edge of all the varieties of excellence. What we can expect particularly is the military kind of excellence, which is the kind that shows itself in a mass.<sup>4</sup>

Military valour is the only virtue that is within the reach of everyone. This is true at the level of the city, and equally so at the level of a people. It is because the Greeks are generously endowed with ‘spiritedness’, *thumos*, that they are uniquely qualified for the art of politics. The same ardour, Aristotle claims, underlies our tendency to attack our enemies and to defend our friends; to register humiliation and to rebel against servitude. *Thumos* is the driving force behind excellence in war, in both of its highly passionate manifestations, courage and anger.<sup>5</sup> *Thumos* is the psychological and social equipment that sets the Greeks apart from peoples who endure monarchy without flinching and peoples who are too excitable to govern themselves or others. Hellenic irascibility strikes the right balance.

Now, Aristotle has a jaundiced view of popular democracy. He persists in seeing Athenian democracy as a corrupt regime, always threatened by an unbridled egalitarianism. There is an ideal state, however, that offers the perfect realization of the democratic principle: the *politeia* Aristotle recommends is a ‘city of citizens’, of which the power of the *dêmos* is a perversion. In such a city, all the citizens would have their turn in participating in government. However, citizenship itself would be the exclusive privilege of an elite: men of independent means, who, in their youth, would have dedicated themselves to warfare, before entering politics in adulthood. Aristotle offers, then, a strongly elitist theory of the value of the collectivity<sup>6</sup>. military virtue is a group quality, but the group in question is a group of warriors, who, on growing older, govern, and are governed by, one another. The same quality of distinction on the battlefield is stretched to become distinction in the political arena.

4. *Politics*, III, 7, 1279 a-b, trans. E. Barker, Oxford, 1946. I have developed these arguments in ‘Gendered politics, or the self-praise of Andres Agathoi’, in R. Balot (ed.), *A Companion to Greek and Roman Political Thought*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 100–117.

5. *Ibidem*, VII, 7, 1327 b–1328 a. On courage, see R. Balot, « The Dark Side of Democratic Courage », *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 71, Spring 2004, p. 73–106 ; Harvey C. Mansfield, *Manliness*, New Heaven, Yale UP, 2006.

6. The masses, in a moderate democracy, also demonstrate good sense: *ibidem*, III, 11, 1381 b 1–9.

Aristotle's thinking parts company with democratic eloquence, though the latter, in its own particular way, is no less elitist. On the one hand, Athenian oratory extends military excellence to the people in their entirety, because all free, adult, male Athenians among the people are citizens and soldiers, whether in the cavalry, the infantry or the navy. On the other hand, it projects this excellence into a foundational conflict: the Athenians were the first to expel their ruling classes, *dunasteiai*, which requires, in a highly concentrated form, a propensity towards freedom, which makes the Greeks allergic to enslavement. Athenians are the best of the Greeks. The Greeks are the best of the political animals. Such animals are sexed. Their *thumos*, the source of martial valour, hence of democratic pride, is also the source of their virile appearance. Democracy, in this vein, becomes a matter of virility. In principle – and physically.

A citizen, let us remind ourselves, is first and foremost a warrior. A warrior has need of the mental and bodily accoutrements that make his body and character fit for combat. This emotional and moral equipment is *thumos*, the source of courage, as well as of wrath. We mentioned earlier that *thumos* accounts for the varying dispositions of nations towards politics. Northern Europeans have too much, Asians have too little and the Hellenes, from Miletus to Marseilles, have just the right amount. Females, however, throughout the animal world, will always suffer from a comparative deficiency. Even among molluscs, it is the male who is the more ready to help (*boethikôteron*) and the more virile (*andreiôteron*): if you ever strike a female squid with your trident, the male will rush to her aid, whereas if you hurt a male, the female will take flight. The female cuttlefish, cowardly and ungrateful, is obviously a paradigm of female behaviour generally. The female character is more malleable (*malakôteros*), easier to domesticate, and less spirited (*athumôteros*); but all female animals, and especially women themselves, are quick to give offence. Females are equally prone to discouragement and despair, they are deceitful but gullible, and also envious and quick-tempered, always complaining, shameful and vain. This is the picture Aristotle paints of them at the beginning of Book 9 of his *History of Animals*. Animals, observes Aristotle, are to varying degrees gregarious, organized,

cooperative and warlike. And in each species, males are always more spirited, *thumôdestera*, and wilder, *agriôtera*, simpler and less skilful; whereas females (except in the case of bears and panthers) are less generously endowed with *thumos*, they are all *athumôtera*. We are clearly in the realm of sexual difference. Courage has the same cause as sexual virility. *Thumos* is located in the heart. The heart is also the source of blood. Blood is produced when the food we ingest is concocted by natural heat, our vital heat. 'The character of the blood affects the temperament and the sensory faculties of animals in many ways. This is indeed what might reasonably be expected, seeing that the blood is the material of which the whole body is made. For nutriment supplies the material, and the blood is the ultimate nutriment. It makes then a considerable difference whether the blood be hot or cold, thin or thick, turbid or clear.'<sup>7</sup> These differences determine in particular an animal's readiness to fight, for a colder and more watery blood is conducive to fear, whereas a thick and more fibrous blood makes animals more angry and spirited, bulls and boars, for example. 'The fibres in the blood, being earthy and solid, are turned into so many hot embers and cause ebullition in the fits of passion.'<sup>8</sup>

Sperm derives from the blood. To be more precise, sperm is nothing other than the product of a subsequent concoction of the blood, again by means of our vital heat. Sperm is therefore blood that has been more thoroughly concocted, hence full of hot air, of *pneuma*. Blood will only turn into sperm if there is a large amount of vital heat in the body, a heat which female bodies do not contain in sufficient quantity. Poorly endowed in terms of animal heat – as demonstrated both by their inability to produce sperm and by the regular discharge of menstrual blood, which remains in its raw state – females will be more open to the sensations of fear, of faintheartedness or, as we are informed in the *History of Animals*, to pointless aggression.

A man's virility in bed depends on the amount of sperm in his body. A man's virility on the battlefield, in a political argument or in a court of law depends on his ability to rouse himself to greater anger or boldness, in defence of something or against it. This arousal starts, once again, in the blood, when it begins to boil and overheat, around the heart.<sup>9</sup>

7. *On the Parts of Animals*, 1, 4, 651a 13–17, trans. W. Ogle, Oxford, 1912.

8. *Ibid.*, 1, 4, 650b 30 – 651a 1–3.

9. Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 1, 2, 403d 25–32, on the physical definition of anger as the ebullition of the blood and of the region surrounding the heart. Naturally, courage and anger are not just a physical event, they are the response to an attack, but the capacity to feel these emotions depends on a certain quantity of blood and on its quality being available in the body. This is why animals may be more or less prone to passion, and why, for example, those with 'watery' blood are timid.

Sexually and politically, virility irradiates from a man's heart, the seat of his *thumos*, it flows in his boiling blood, it irrigates and feeds his hot, dense muscles, brimming with energy, and, finally, enlivens his frothy sperm.<sup>10</sup> This physical process produces an identity that is sexual through and through. Women are timid because they are cold and clammy; they are cowardly because they are soft – first and foremost, in the material sense. Their flesh is watery, spongy, phlegmatic, whence this physiological haemorrhaging constituted by menstruation. As the Hippocratic Corpus had already theorized, in a mild climate and a comfortable environment, men, too, grow soft, with sexual dimorphism becoming less pronounced as a result: all individuals resemble one another and share the same docile, peaceful character.<sup>11</sup>

Aristotelian ethology is based on a binary set of patterns: on the female side, we find a few useful qualities, the capacity to bear, feed and bring up children; this is accompanied, however, by a rather longer list of unpleasant and antisocial behavioural traits – such as envy, a tendency to argue, instability, faintheartedness and resentment; on the male side, we see a whole array of types of deliberate actions relating to defence, competition, cooperation, solidarity, courage, composure, relating, then, to the political sphere.<sup>12</sup> Virility, a noble bridge between the valiant mollusc and the hoplite – and also with the active citizen, because courage is, for Aristotle, a quality of those infantrymen who rebel against monarchs, by virtue of which they invent the egalitarian autonomy of the citizens. Women's souls, declares Aristotle in the opening pages of his *Politics*, have the same components as men's, and women are just as capable of deliberation as men (and in contrast to slaves), but they cannot uphold their decisions with authority, being *akuros*. Now, it is deliberation of the sort one is prepared to stand by that is the stuff of politics. A woman's soul is thus adapted to her natural function, which is to obey a man at all times, within the confined space of the household, but certainly not outside, in the arena, where word is action. The most intense passions are those of men. Not letting go of sexual difference does not mean seeing women everywhere but seeing a sexed masculine, where it really is.

A sexed individual is, in short, a combination of anatomy, physiology and behaviour. The body forms habits, which the law then corroborates. That is why the difference

10. Aristotle's theory of sperm can be found in *On the Generation of Animals*, 1, 2. See also *On the Motion of Animals*, 11. He sets up an analogy between the heart and the penis, on the basis of their involuntary movements. Both organs contain the essential humidity, blood and sperm; each is to a certain extent a separate animal.

11. Hippocrates, *On Airs, Waters and Places*, 10, 19–20. See Helen King, *Hippocrates' Woman. Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece*, Routledge, 1999, pp. 19–20, 39; Giulia Sissa, *Le corps virginal. La virginité féminine en Grèce ancienne*, Paris, Vrin, 1987 [Greek Virginité, Harvard University Press, 1990].

12. The disposition to look after the young is a characteristic of the female, just as the anatomical equipment for attack and defence, such as claws, nails and a beak are apportioned to male bodies. Aristotle's examination of the bee species offers an example of this binary logic. See *On the Generation of Animals*, III, 10, 759b 1–7.

between the sexes becomes division of the sexes: being a woman is simply incompatible with being what one must be in order to function as a warrior citizen. And so women must stay at home. That is why the intrusion of women into the space of politics is systematically a transgression, often ridiculous and always pacifist. Furthermore, female cowardice is not simply opposed to virile valiance: softness can become contagious. Listen to Lysistrata or Praxagora, in Aristophanes; or Artemis in Herodotus; or the mothers and sisters of warriors who have fallen in battle in the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides – and you are in danger of being persuaded that war is not that wonderful. Go and contemplate a beautiful woman – and like the suitors of Penelope, you will feel weak at the knees. Now look, instead, at Athena, covered in bronze and leather, striking terror into the heart with the lightning from her lance, when ships sail too close to the Acropolis, and sporting on her breast the reptilian head of the Gorgon: she is the Virgin, sprung from the head of her father, the woman who is anti-woman – a body that shuns sex and has never known a mother's body.

Since the active, and constantly reactivated, division of the masculine and the feminine creates the realm of the political, and keeps it safe from the incursions of women, whenever a play or a work of fiction elaborates the theme of sexual difference – it raises an issue in political theory. The work of Nicole Loraux, especially *The Children of Athena*, has opened up a path for us, so that we can refine the radical understanding of the foundational division between the realm of the military-cum-political and the realm of the domestic. For, taking as our starting point what may well strike us as a paradox in the democracy of the ancients – the sexism Nicole has mapped out for us – we can advance more easily through the stages of a mode of political thinking that is never blind to sexual difference. Nicole makes our task easier, if only we are prepared to listen to Greek discourse on suffering and pleasure; on death or life. Ares and Aphrodite.

### The virilization of philosophy

That is all cultural history, which is fine. But: where does philosophy come into it? How does one woman's thinking add up to the philosopher's craft? Nicole Loraux has pieced together a particular image of Socrates ('Therefore Socrates is immortal', *Le Temps de la réflexion*, 1982, pp. 19–46). Socrates the founder, the Socrates who is brandishing not a book but a cup of poison. A warrior-citizen, whose exemplary toughness on the pretext that these laws have been unjustly applied to him. The heroic Socrates, whose masculinity is never in doubt and who, to get the place ready for intelligent talk, must clear it of the womenfolk. Read with Nicole, the *Phaidon* takes on a clear cultural significance. In the prison cellar where he is preparing himself for death by drinking the hemlock to the last mouthful, while he talks with his friends about the body and the soul, true life and true death, pleasure and pain, sensations and the intellect, Socrates must perform this abominable action: dismiss his wife and children, their tears and their compassion.

Be off with you! Was it really necessary to treat this woman like some poor soul of limited intelligence, who, because she felt for him, could not possibly understand? Yes, it was – if the logic of sexual difference works in the way we have said it does. So, there it is, the difference that becomes division, at work in real time. A woman is present because it is, after all, a woman's role to comfort her dying husband. She must be dismissed. Why, exactly? Because, if men allowed themselves to be won over by her sobbing, that would make it impossible for the philosopher to carry out, as indeed he must, the task of self-anaesthetization. The use of the dialogue form was spawned by this inaugural act, by this defeminization of the philosophical stage.

Dismissing women was a necessity. And with them the banality of the body, anguish and the reality of death. Now it's up to us! We must join together in overturning all commonly held opinions, petty conventions and vulgar beliefs. Let us redefine everything: life and death; pain and pleasure; the soul, the body and subjectivity. Plato is suffering.

Plato will write dialogue after dialogue in the shadow of this action. In the *Phaidon*, Plato has taken the trouble to alert us to the fact that the field of philosophy was built upon the necessary absence of all those things a woman cannot help taking everywhere with her – common sense, an insistence on mourning, a permanent aura of tragedy. Nicole has provided a magnifying glass that enlarges the importance of this exclusion, for the benefit of those of us who might be ‘gender blind’. Whenever a woman appears on the horizon and starts to speak: beware of irony!

Socrates’ death will become a paradigm of death for the Stoics, and subsequently for Christians. Time, now, to trace the fortunes of this paradigm, taking our cue from Nicole’s reading of the *Phaidon*. On the eve of his suicide, Cato of Utica read the *Phaidon*. He read it twice. Seneca, in his letter to Lucilius (*Epistle 24*) on fearing and disdaining death, and Plutarch, in his *Life of Cato*, reconstruct this poignant scene.<sup>13</sup> A dinner with his friends; a conversation on philosophical subjects, including the paradoxes of the Stoics on freedom and slavery; the old mentor’s endearing concern for his friends, then the pages read alone, and even a few hours of undisturbed sleep. This serenity was momentarily interrupted, Plutarch tells us, by a brutal discovery: someone had dared to remove his sword from his bedchamber. His son, terrified, is the culprit. Cato is angry, retrieves his weapon and exclaims: ‘Now, I am the master of my own destiny!’ He checks the sharpness of the blade, then continues reading. Twice, during the night, Cato returns to the same text, the *Phaidon*, which provides him with the supreme example.

The Stoics, then, borrowed from Socrates the key virtue of fortitudo in the face of death, of a chosen, willed death. Christians, in their turn, would adopt the paradigm of Socratic courage, in confronting martyrdom. One of their number, however, Tertullian, would see things differently. For Tertullian, Socrates, and the Stoics who came after him, greeted death on comfortable beds, reciting nonsense, in the name of false gods. All that is in the past. Now, there is a ‘new death’. The most steadfast of all the martyrs is a woman, Perpetua, who, in Carthage in 203, was torn to pieces by wild beasts, in the name of the one true God. Perpetua, a woman, is the anti-Socrates.

13. Seneca, *Epistle 24.6–8*; Plutarch, *Cato*, 67–70.



Whereas the Athenian died in Adam, conversing with his friends, as he lay on his bed, Perpetua, by falling in the amphitheatre, exemplifies *la nova mors*, the death that Christ has brought into the world. If we now place Socrates and Perpetua side by side, we see a whole set of contrasts emerge, which crystallize around one dominant idea: Socrates, in spite of his good intentions, could not show true *constantia*; could not correctly interpret what was happening to him; and could not die like a martyr *fortissimus*, because he had worshipped false gods and followed the inspiration of a false *pneuma*. It is Perpetua who gives us the most sublime example of the 'new death', despite her femininity.

However, reading the medieval sourcebook *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*,<sup>14</sup> still alongside the *Phaidon*, we find in it, to our complete surprise, the same act of defeminization. The condemned, including the two young women, engage in friendly conversation. They proceed to redefine life and death. What others think of as death is the true life. To this is added the inversion of victory and defeat. They think that we are the victims, but we are triumphant conquerors; they believe that we are prisoners, whereas we are free. They are killing us, but we are winning our war against evil. Before a coarse and blind audience, a performance will take place that only Christians will be able to observe: not the humiliating execution of a few fanatics, but the glorious reversal of the Fall. Everything is turned on its head: including pain and pleasure. A new identity emerges in the face of death: that of true Christians, proud to acknowledge themselves as such. Perpetua's father finds it all incomprehensible: she enters into a brief dialogue with him, which develops along the lines of an authentic Socratic dialogue in miniature.

The martyrs are at peace with themselves. They prefer to comfort others, rather than to be comforted themselves. They reject pain and mourning, and especially the compassion of their families. Perpetua is indifferent, impatient and hostile, first of all towards her father, then towards her own child, and who she is relieved to not have to feed it any more. By this action, Perpetua disavows her own maternity. She refuses all affection; she chooses fortitude. Caring for the family is what marriage is all about in Christian literature, and it becomes an argument in the discussions on the value of virginity. Perpetua goes so far as to show a real

14. *Passion de Perpétue et de Félicité. Actes*, texte établi, traduit et commenté par Jacqueline Amat, Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 1996.

aversion for married life, in order to focus her thoughts on God and prepare herself to meet death. This contempt for her role as a woman culminates in a dream. Perpetua has visions. In the first of them, she finds herself in a symbolic garden. In the second one, Perpetua, a woman, becomes a man: '*Facta sum masculus!*'<sup>15</sup>

15. *Op. cit.*, 10. 7.

In short, all the ideas that Socrates had assembled in the *Phaidon* with such daring and boldness resurface in the paradoxes of the martyr. It is so vitally important to make oneself immune to female softness that even a woman must cease to be a woman. That is the price of *fortitude*. All this leaps off the page at us. But without Nicole, we would not have seen it so clearly.

### Outside the frame and beneath the text

I would like to conclude with a few words about what our American friends might call the poststructuralism of Nicole Loraux: psychoanalysis; the conversation with Jacques Derrida.

A little psychoanalysis makes us pay more attention to what is repressed, to what remains unsaid, to what has to be read between the lines of a text. A lot of psychoanalysis alerts us to repetition, to reminiscence, to the memory that makes us ill. It was the latter perspective that Nicole borrowed from psychoanalysis. This option led her to examine the normative effects of desire in culture: what desire makes us do and say. How a society should decide whether to say nothing about or to revisit dissension and conflicts in its public, collective memory. How, if a society opts actively to forget, the injunction to do so should be formulated: we must no longer call to mind, at a given moment, that which tore us apart. How, whichever way it is done, the injunction does not always work. Her work on the Athenian amnesty and on the memory of the stasis reconstitutes the paradoxes of reconciliation: one should no doubt remember, but not recall.

And once again, we encounter the presence of women. For mourning is one of the missions of women. Women suffer and weep and keep alive the memory of the violence that is undergone, the defeat that is irreversible and death as loss. This reactivation of pain means that mothers and daughters, wives and sisters, as well as being where they should be – where the tears expected of them flow – become, at the same time, outsiders in relation to the political, the philosophical and, a point I wish to stress, the military order – an order which requires the strength to forget about death. Away with you, Xanthippe. How dare you, Antigone? Enough, Electra! Their unrepressed suffering, on account of losses that they will not deny, makes of women the most memorable tragic heroines. And, through them, suffering on stage, we learn from Nicole, makes the very essence of tragedy. Away with you, poets!, continues Plato.

Of course tragedy should be brought back into the city, but only where the city has marked out a space / time that is deeply anti-political, the space/time of pain, a pain that shows no shame, a pain that is actively embraced, a pain that, in spite of everything, is indestructible: that, for me, is an enormous contribution to our understanding of the theatre.

For my last point, I come to Jacques Derrida and 'Plato's Pharmacy' (*Dissemination*, Chicago U.P., 1981), a text which, to my mind, is a classic. It explains how, in Plato, the metaphysical ambition takes shape and is an instantaneous failure. A firework display and grand finale, in a single evening. The content level separates out a whole series of pairs of opposites, the values of which are asymmetrical – form and material object, body and soul, speech and writing – but the language manages to undo this binary logic. Thus the spoken word becomes, in the idiom of the Platonic text, an inner writing. The dichotomy is fudged, transcended, untenable. Platonic reasoning opposes the sexes, attaches them to the very clear polarity of the virile soul and the feminine body, but through the slippage of language, the soul is a female body or, more precisely, becomes one. When conceiving, thinking, and understanding turn out to be

an uphill struggle, then Psyche begins to fight for breath, torn apart and tormented by the pain of childbirth.<sup>16</sup>

Nicole also found in Derrida an interpretive model for sexual difference. For her, it is more a question of appropriation: the representation of the masculine will include, make its own the experience of the feminine, following the example of Tiresias, who, though a man, experienced a transformation into a woman, and so knows what it is like to belong to both sexes. Whether, on this point, I agree or not does not matter. What I wish to emphasize, once again, is the oscillation between, on the one hand, actions that divide and separate and, on the other, their inability to maintain that division and separation. From start to finish, with Nicole Loraux, we are with a woman, a way of thinking. And Hypatia is looking at us – in the distance, from a distance.

The passions. A short-sighted colleague might doubt that an interest in political emotions reveals a growing female presence among philosophers. But even here, we must remind ourselves that the most intense passions are those of men. Keeping sexual difference in our sights does not mean seeing women everywhere but seeing a sexed masculinity, where it really is.

16. I have tried to demonstrate this in a recent work: *L'Âme est un corps de femme* [The Soul is a Female Body], Paris, Odile Jacob, 2000. On the same themes, see the recent discussions of S. Agacinski, *Métaphysique des Sexes* [Metaphysics of the Sexes], Paris, Le Seuil, 2005.

## Alexandra AHOUEJINOU

### The obstacle and its circumvention

Obstacle, from the Latin *obstaculum*, from *obstare*, 'to stand before'. However, is it not the case that what stands before has only to stand there? Is the obstacle not merely that which I encounter or with which I collide, as I might collide with a tree trunk that stands in my path? What is the obstacle for me as a thinking person when it arises because and only because I am a woman and a philosopher?

Is it not the case that the name woman philosopher which I give myself exists only because of the obstacle? Is not the obstacle precisely that which, from the moment it rises, not only questions you but creates your condition? Is not it rather the case that at the very moment the obstacle presents itself the indistinct and arbitrarily articulated condition of woman philosopher takes shape and is established on the basis of two initially quite distinct facts, woman and philosopher? For before the obstacle arose, this condition precisely did not seem to be a condition. Being a woman and a philosopher in no way implied the condition of woman philosopher. It is an artificial association based on two facts, observing nothing that might legitimate a link or some kind of common ground.

This obstacle that I encounter determines and defines me, it points at me, clutches me, harpoons me and clings only to that one term, woman philosopher, presenting me with an image, a representation which I had not considered and which, the moment before, was not imbued with any positive density or reality for me.

Therefore, the obstacle, through the circumventions and determinations which it places in my way, not only causes an awakening of awareness and a shedding of Edenic insouciance, but seems to go as far as creating and imposing on me a new condition,

that of a woman philosopher. In this sense, the obstacle, understood as that which stands before me, questions me to my very substance, forcing this inner existence to reflect. The wall with which I suddenly come into collision opens in me a new door to thought.

### Obstacle and duality

However, is it not the case that this obstacle which stands before me exhibits a contradiction, and therefore an inherent illegitimacy when it puts forward and imposes on me this new condition of woman philosopher, only to oppose it immediately after? 'It is because I see you and define you as a woman philosopher that I oppose you as a woman philosopher.'

In other words this condition, being newly established, is to the obstacle nothing more than a fact: the fact of being a woman philosopher. A fact the legitimacy of which is immediately denied and the actualization of which the obstacle attempts to thwart. The obstacle poses and imposes what it understands as a fact, only to deny almost immediately any legitimacy it may have, thereby deciding to neutralize any possible development or realization of its potential.

In this sense, the obstacle is both positively and negatively charged: it attests and immediately contests. However, in this alternating game, the reason why it does not neutralize itself, is that it avoids contradiction; its duality is not an assemblage of opposites; to attest the fact of 'being a woman philosopher' only to subsequently deny its legitimacy is not the same as attesting it and then denying its existence. Here, then, contesting is not contradicting.

In this sense, the obstacle does not deny a woman philosopher the possibility of becoming a philosopher, as, in obstructing that possibility, it implicitly acknowledges that the possibility is real: only that which has previously been attested as existing or possible can be opposed.

Its opposition is therefore an attestation, its denial an assertion. The obstacle cannot deny that it acknowledges that the grass which it is desperately trying to cut has already grown under its feet.

In its stubborn opposition, far from negating or denying the existence of that which it confronts, the obstacle at least has the merit that it attests, surreptitiously and secretly, the possibility of being and the range of possibilities for the object of its opposition. The obstacle does not merely insist on obstructing; it is not content with just thwarting or neutralizing in the object of its obstinacy any possibility or potentiality to become actual.

### Reality and reference

However, are the positivity of my condition, which is entirely created, and this declared illegitimacy real? What is the obstacle actually obstructing?

Is there not something purely reductive in the obstacle; does this condition which it reflects back to me, and which it has decided to obstruct, refer to what is, to what I am? In its determination to obstruct me, does the obstacle not also reveal its determination to rise up against the multiplicity and multicoloured abundance of my being, or more generally the innate and diffuse diversity of existence?

In this context, the obstacle is triply reductive when it opposes, through a restrictive and a priori definition, everything that it believes me to be. In this sense, it opposes only a part of me or, worse, its interpretation of that part of me. Thus it restricts my vitality on the grounds of reducing me to an identity that dreads all multiplicity.

Three reductions, then: first, that which creates an invalid link between an essential attribute – being a philosopher – and an accidental attribute – being a woman. Essential attribute because if I, like Socrates<sup>1</sup>, believe that a life which is unexamined, and which therefore lacks philosophy, is a life that reduces me almost to the level of an animal

1. Plato, *Apology of Socrates*.

and in that sense is not worth living, then being a philosopher is an essential attribute. A triple reduction: first, an essential attribute and an accidental attribute are reduced to the same level. Second, I am interpreted in accordance with this reduced reality. Third, my range of possibilities is reduced. Consequently, the thought that makes me the philosopher I am takes shape in me even more and is affirmed even more. By desiring to obstruct me as a philosopher, the obstacle actually nourishes, sustains and encourages my thought. And, far from distracting me from the development of my thought, it inspires and stimulates it.

Furthermore, this arbitrary obstacle, which places itself in my path because of what I am, or rather because of what I represent to it, refers me not only to the artificial condition of woman philosopher but also to the arbitrary in other forms, in a more fundamental feeling of expansion, in collegial commiseration. This discretionary judgement, this iniquitous condemnation makes me think of the arbitrariness of other judgements and other condemnations. In short, then, it makes me reflect on the condition of myself and of others.

In other words, the obstacle which places itself before me because I am a woman and a philosopher opens me up to the arbitrary and the iniquitous in many other forms. Injustice and lack of integrity refer me to and remind me of other injustices. Experiencing the obstacle opens me up to other experiences. The obstacle, far from imprisoning me, expands my horizons, awakens me and makes me reflect, when it invites me to the other, in a shared experience of its discrimination. The obstacle therefore does not induce a withdrawal into oneself, to oneness, but an opening to the many; from the moment it arises, it makes me the compassionate soldier for all others who have suffered discrimination.

Pointing at me and opposing me as a woman philosopher also makes me think about and feel the arbitrariness with which others are pointed at, judged and discriminated against. The obstacle therefore opens me up to a universal concern and, while referring me to my condition, it refers me to the 'other'.



The obstacle, an otherness initially perceived as negative, this complete other which places itself before me, actually opens me up to an expanded and enriched otherness. This confining particularity, this dividing wall, pierces a way through to the other.

### The moment I meet the obstacle: a special moment

However, this opening up to the other is only the obstacle's second phase, because the first phase seems to refer to nothing and no one. If the obstacle has not been considered, or anticipated, or pre-empted, it places itself in my path in a violent collision, a sudden shock, a deafening blow.

When the obstacle abruptly frustrates my plans and suddenly deprives my thought of a future, at that very moment my thought stops and has no subject or object. Or rather it no longer takes either subject or object from what is ahead of it, but rather from what is. The obstacle therefore assigns me to a present that has no future, to the present not of existence but of that which silently falls upon it, that which dawns in an imperceptible presence – I mean the present of Being.

Thought thinks about nothing, in that it frees itself from the demands of existence in order to open itself up to an inaugural silence and to what is, listening to the ontological presence. For, when the obstacle cuts off my range of possibilities, it obscures my view, disenchanting my future, blocks my horizon and shifts things and existences in order to open me up, suddenly, to a completely different presence, a differential dawn, the efflorescent unfurling of Being.

Thus the moment I meet the obstacle, the main collision, may be experienced and thought about in two different ways, one the antithesis of the other.

That is, the obstacle becomes far too present in me, to the point where it alienates and overwhelms me in its ontic airtightness. The only reality which then exists and invades me becomes that of its thick heaviness, its monumental immersion. The obstacle's existence is thus the only reality that inundates me, submerges me and spreads through me. It staggers me, stuns me and numbs me, petrifies and immobilizes my thought. In its ontic dictatorship, it leaves room only for its reality and nothing else; precisely nothing besides itself in its ontic immensity. The obstacle makes too much noise in me; its constant humming obscures the silence that is released and liberated by the initial collapse, the crumbling of all my plans, all my references, all my bearings.

Yet if I decide that the obstacle will not succeed, will not make so much noise in me, will not manage to exhaust me – in short, if I do not allow myself to be overwhelmed by the obstacle – I can then listen to existence collapsing and sliding, allowing the minute and impalpable presence of Being to be discovered in a singular dawn. Then the obstacle becomes a source of revelation for me: of ontological revelation.

### Resistance to the obstacle: bypassing in two senses

This obstacle, felt and thought about, now turns into resistance. The obstacle here allows itself to be bypassed in two senses: first my own bypassing in that I tolerate it, I 'acknowledge' it, I 'stomach' it, carrying on regardless of the previous moment of dull stupefaction to allow myself to be penetrated by the silence which it releases. Then, in overcoming it, I also overcome the diminished reality which it places in my path in its brief and abbreviated interpretation of my being, because the condition of woman philosopher which it imposes on me and whose legitimacy it completely denies, is only a pale idea, a colourless replica of the real thing which, unlike the Platonic idea, forms part of an impoverished realism, an insipid concept, a feeble and faded parody.

By bypassing it, then, I affirm more than the obstacle in that I affirm myself in the real positivity of my existence. I contrast the distorted fact, the narrow interpretation, with the luxuriance of the real, the profuse outpouring and impetuous exuberance of my being. What is more, by overcoming the obstacle, I also give its originator the chance to broaden their vision, widen their horizons, expand their resistances. From the condition of woman philosopher which it imposes on me, it is invited to return to the simple and real fact: woman and philosopher. By bypassing it, I invite it again to bypass itself, to really experience who I am, to overcome its prejudices or lack of knowledge; in short, to live life first before the idea. Overcoming the obstacle may, then, mean bypassing it in more than two senses; the bypassing may be threefold if it expands and increases its own originator's awareness; in short, if it counts, this time, on the Platonic idea that 'no one is wicked voluntarily'<sup>2</sup>.

2. Platon, *Meno*.

#### From reaction to action: the restoration of possibilities

However, in my reaction to the obstacle, I need to avoid the sly and stealthy pitfall, the surreptitious and covert risk of plunging furiously and wildly into its game. To play the obstacle's game is to throw yourself headlong into its restrictive viewpoint; it is to want suddenly to affirm that reduced viewpoint, the fictive condition that it imposes on me while yet refusing me. To fall into the obstacle's trap is to want stubbornly to give legitimacy to a condition that it has created from every piece and every fiction.

Thus, by reaction, if I assert myself to the obstacle as a woman philosopher, I then seek only to find or win the legitimacy of an invalid and arbitrary condition and I thereby in turn and without knowing it implicitly assert that I am a woman philosopher. I therefore consent to this narrow and restricted definition dictated, imposed and placed in my path by the obstacle.

React to the obstacle, certainly, but without getting involved in its game or being limited to its viewpoint; overcoming the obstacle also means being able to go beyond its restrictive viewpoint, to see beyond the end of its nose. The claim should not limit the intention.

To get beyond the obstacle, the claim of being a woman philosopher should not linger too long or take root in a demanding and stagnant rigidity; it should quickly expand and spread out with a more sweeping outlook, gathering momentum from the real fact that I am a woman and a philosopher; in other words, first and foremost a philosopher.

Reaction must therefore be capable of being followed by action; confining oneself to reaction would be to make reaction an end and not a means. In the imbalance caused by the obstacle, in the range of possibilities of which it deprives me, I need to find the reviving or innovative action that allows me to rediscover, restore, recapture, even create those possibilities. For, when I overcome the obstacle, it still has the virtue of stirring me both to action and invention, to confrontation and creation. Attempting to restore the possibilities cut off by the obstacle most often encourages my innovation. The obstacle stimulates my imagination, allowing a new combination of futures to be established.

### Sharing possibilities

This mutilation of possibilities by the obstacle, this diminishing of being that it tries to inflict on me, is actually only an exhortation to being more, an invitation to perseverance.

When the obstacle opens me up to thought, it provokes in me an excess of being, an impetuous ardour, a lively enthusiasm to be who I am. The more the obstacle tries to diminish me, the more it makes me persevere in being. What is more, this opening up, this growth of being may extend to the other because, in overcoming the obstacle, I again invite its originator to free themselves, to liberate themselves from their enslaving judgement.

Overcoming the obstacle therefore involves not only myself but the other; not only myself but the others, because in this conquest or recapturing of the range of mutilated possibilities, in this attempt to restore a disturbed equilibrium, resistance to the obstacle also opens up to others the possibility of being who they are – or, in this case, who they, being women, are.

Thus any woman and philosopher who has broken through a cynical glass ceiling, decompartmentalized a tendentious system, dismantled obstructive prejudices or defied belittling looks, will open up for herself and others a horizon of radiant possibilities, a colourful dawn of adventures and hopes, a joy in persevering in her most intimate being, in her being a philosopher.

It should be affirmed, to paraphrase Nietzsche in *Twilight of the Idols*, Maxims and Arrows 8, that 'who does not kill me makes me stronger'; and going much further: who does not kill me in being makes us stronger.

To resist the obstacle is to engage myself and others, to increase and expand my singular survival to a collective survival. Overcoming the obstacle therefore becomes no longer a desire but actually a duty, because to allow oneself to be knocked down is to allow the range of possibilities to be knocked down, both for myself and for others; it is to consent to watch the inaugural peak of hopes die and dissolve. Resisting and overcoming the obstacle becomes the only thing which I imperatively and categorically must do, just as I must recognize what is as clear and obvious as daylight: that if the obstacle is also mine, it is also ours.

## Susana VILLAVICENCIO

The bicentenary of the independence of several Latin American countries in 2010 (also the anniversary of the revolutions in Mexico, Argentina, Chile and Colombia) affords an opportunity to shed new light on the formation of our states and to reflect on the significance of our identity. As these celebrations will on each occasion be calendar highlights, we shall consider our history anew, which does not entail strengthening accounts of the past or the state's hagiographical versions, but requires us to question the instances of inclusion and exclusion, domination and hegemony, and the subaltern conditions of this national construct. Such a review is based on the belief that our identity is the result of dynamics rather than a historical given, the outcome of a dissonant chorus rather than orderly consensus.

It was on the basis of these considerations that I proposed to speak on political correctness in the light of the independence of Latin American countries. How does the issue of political correctness guide our reflections on national identity? How can this issue also inform reflection specifically on women philosophers?

First, it must be acknowledged that the bicentenary of the former Latin American colonies' accession to independence is being celebrated at a time of significant social and political change. Several countries amended their constitutions in the 1990s to incorporate the rights of indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples, known as 'natives' during the period of colonial domination, thus became political subjects seeking recognition of their rights to land, natural resources and their own culture. Their demand casts a doubt over our national communities' supposedly homogeneous composition. I should like to mention that the political model introduced by the elites of the independence revolutions had led to paternalistic political practices and to the limited citizenship that has characterized Argentina's political history.

Furthermore, national unity had been conceived as entailing cultural homogenization rather than recognition of the diversity of the cultures that constitute the social foundation of this state. The enshrinement of this foundational blueprint in institutions, laws and practices will therefore always bear the marks of tension, misunderstanding and the marginalization of minority cultures.

In the current process of globalization that is reorganizing the local and international public arena, the new scenario forces us to rethink the meaning of public commons. Topical issues today include the plurinational state, community rights and cultural, ethnic and gender diversity (Argentina was the first country in Latin America to pass an egalitarian marriage law, between contracting parties rather than between man and woman).

Second, in recent decades the duality that previously characterized the representations of Latin American identity – civilization and barbarism to quote Sarmiento's famous expression – has gradually given way to interpretations allowing the diversity of spatially coexistent subjects, processes and time frames. At the same time, the continent has made progress on the democratic front and essentialist ideas about national identity or the meaning of 'Latin American', posited as a means of integration in nation-building, have been destabilized, while the expansion of the media, which has boosted social imagination, has raised the visibility of the representations of non-official sectors or of excluded groups themselves. Lastly, new subjects which transcend the logic and temporality of Western thought have been recognized as a result of affirmative action by some groups and conceptual categories developed by academic institutions, social organizations and development programmes formulated by international agencies.

For the first time, four presidents in the region are women: Michèle Bachelet (a resistance figure who protested against the coup d'état by the dictator Pinochet) in Chile, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina, Laura Chinchilla in Costa Rica and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil. Furthermore, a worker, Lula, has been the president of Brazil for eight years, and a representative of the Aymara community, Evo Morales, is the president of Bolivia. The access of women to the highest level of the judiciary is the culmination of a long history of struggles and demands that began upon accession to independence. Women such as Juana Azurduy, Mariquita Sánchez in Argentina, Manuela Saenz in Colombia and Ecuador, and many others stand as patriotic figures. The political and intellectual history of Latin American countries has been marked by the names of many other women, be they politicians, poets, writers or thinkers.

The second consideration is contained in the following question: What meaning can we ascribe to political correctness? We understand political correctness as an approach to the interpretation of historical facts that dispenses justice to those who have been excluded from a particular discourse on the meaning of 'human'. The term 'political correctness' comes from the United States and it is a policy that takes a multicultural approach to the interpretation of classical works of literature, philosophy and history of art. It entails 'correcting' those works by removing 'incorrect' content on minorities (women, blacks, Hispanics, homosexuals, colonized peoples, etc.). Political correctness draws on the 'affirmative action' movement (referred to in French as discrimination positive) and 'rests on the idea that, in order to repair an inequality, it is appropriate to valorize one difference against another difference'<sup>1</sup>.

Political correctness was originally used by conservatives to refer to an educational policy promoted by the radical left; its denunciation was therefore organized and manipulated by conservative groups in the Congress and Senate. Derrida has described political correctness as a slogan that has been misused in the United States or used

1. Elisabeth Roudinesco, in J. Derrida and E. Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow ... A Dialogue*, trans. Jeff Fort, Stanford U.P., 2004, p. 25.



rhetorically in France, but he has nonetheless counselled vigilance to ensure that identification of phallogentrism and racial discrimination in education, language, history, literature and thought does not result in the expurgation of texts on the past. As to the situation of women, although other inequalities are involved, lawful combative steps, closely linked to affirmative action, must be taken. According to Derrida:

Let's never forget that the examples of 'communities' associated with the idea 'communitarianism' are always minority (or minoritized) communities who are underrepresented and even reduced to silence. Now, what is defended under the banner of secular and republican universalism (and this is what they want neither to say nor to see) is also a *communitarian* constellation: the *French* republic, the *French* citizenry, the *French* language, the indivisible unity of a *national territory*, in short, an ensemble of cultural traits bound up in the history of a nation-state, embodied in it, in its tradition and in a dominant part of its history. ... Heterosexual phallogentrism decried by the so-called communitarianism of women and 'Gays and Lesbians' could be added to the list for, as this 'community' is ... largely hegemonic in the context of this debate, one can easily deny its character as a 'community' along with all the communitarian interests it defends.<sup>2</sup>

2. Jacques Derrida, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

As a Latin American woman philosopher, I can make the following points about political correctness:

1 - As philosophy is universalist in outlook, so too, in my opinion, are women philosophers, and the situation must be considered in terms of means of access and instruments of dissemination. There is no substantive difference between a European woman philosopher and a Latin American woman philosopher, apart from the visibility of their reflective work. The first philosophy thesis on feminism defended at the University of Buenos Aires was submitted by Elvira Lopez in 1901. The Latin American therefore undergoes the same training and uses the same philosophical language but has fewer means.

2 - The key issue at stake in our reflections today is one challenging philosophy and politics that have been hegemonic, whether they have been dubbed logocentric, phallo-logocentric or Eurocentric. But as Derrida has said, it is still from within that strand that such a philosophy and such politics must be deconstructed. Although, from the activist's standpoint, attention could be paid to the visibility of specific politically correct feminist voices, I am somewhat opposed to the idea of being considered to speak for any field other than philosophy – as long as it is critical political philosophy.

3 - We must again reflect on the meaning of universalism and reinstate the concept of difference, in particular gender difference, in order to formulate a new conception of the word 'human' that supersedes the old concepts of human race and thus raises anew the question of the commons, a world based on sharing and emancipation.

## Emilienne BANETH

Boldly situating itself at the juncture of academic theory and political praxis, this conference broaches the institutional and structural question of the very rationale behind the Network of Women Philosophers and its place in UNESCO's cultural mission. The expression 'politically correct', remarkable in its inherent irony – it is only ever used as a quote – raises the twin issues of the enunciative space we have invested here and now as a place of power, or at least of power-to-speak, and of the link between that place of power and other marginal, potentially non-institutional, invisible or unknown enunciative spaces, of fora used by women outside this network. The question implied by the title of the conference: 'is a network of (culturally diverse) women philosophers nothing but political correctness' therefore raises a series of issues ranging from the necessarily multifaceted definitions of 'woman', to the dynamic, thorny and thought-provoking problem of the choice of languages used for discussion, and the relations of these languages to the knowledge and multiple etymologies implicit in the term 'philosophy'.

The thorny issue is also central for UNESCO, an institution intent on breaking away from the dichotomy of centre and periphery, but which it may sometimes unwittingly reproduce.

I shall first briefly touch on some affinities between feminism and post-colonialism, two theoretical movements that have focused salutary attention on the hegemony of Western and male-dominated scientific norms, representations produced by 'dead white males' or 'young white males'.

Next, I shall evoke the inevitable proximity of institutionalized sites of enunciation with sites of power and elaborate on some of the various meanings of the expression 'politically correct' in that context.

Lastly, through a case study of the uncomprehending reaction of Terry Eagleton to Gayatri Spivak, I shall point to the tensions in the never-ending decentring of knowledge.

In the current conditions of what is known as globalization, understood simultaneously as the reinforcement of global economic dynamics and the imposition of Eurocentric cultural norms, gender issues and the status of women are inextricably linked to the goals of post-colonial criticism. One of the first theoretical essays explicitly linking the two issues, written twenty-five years ago and a landmark to this day, links the question of representation to enunciation, or the existence of the speaking subject. Gayatri Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?*<sup>1</sup> was produced as part of her collaboration with the Subaltern Studies Group, whose scientific objective was to have history written on the basis of stories recounted by the 'subalterns' of Indian society. By concentrating the question on women, Spivak highlighted the ambiguity of representing a historically silent subject, which raises the question of whether such representation constitutes yet another means of exerting power over an irretrievable story.

Herein lies the problem addressed today. Who is speaking on whose behalf? Through whom? Who is listening? It must be acknowledged that feminist and post-colonial issues are often posited by contrasting theory and practice, there being so much at stake in these knowledge and power revolutions, as they relate to the emancipation of the people in question. The essentially Foucauldian connection between the two spheres is even stronger in post-colonial relations and gender relations, which are inextricably linked. How can the exteriority or invisibility of some topics in the dominant discourses of politics, economics and international law be evinced without using the very epistemologies on which such discourses rest?

Gayatri Spivak pointed long ago, in the above-mentioned essay, to the likelihood of feminist activism being somewhat instrumentalized in political domination strategies: referring to the British campaign to abolish suttee (Sanskrit sati, the custom of a widow's immolation on her husband's funeral pyre) in India, she wrote ironically: 'White men are saving brown women from brown men.'

1. Gayatri Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* [1985], in P. Williams and L. Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory, a Reader*, New York/London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994.

Naturally, in this example from British colonial history, self-immolated widows were always 'represented' in colonial discourse, but as objects of intervention rather than subjects or agents. However, self-representation is a narrative and discursive construct as much as representation by others, hence the difficulty inherent in 'woman philosopher'. How can the cultural complexity of 'woman' be represented? How can one argue the existence of a uniform site of enunciation and reception that would warrant the use of 'philosophy' in the singular? The two expressions give rise to numerous questions explored by the organizers in their concept note. Although self-representation as 'non-Western women philosophers' provides an enunciative space and validates a discursive situation, the invitation to such self-representation could also constitute the fetishization of an experience that might ultimately make the subject invisible in a different way.

It is in this context that concern over the expression 'politically correct' becomes fully significant.

Without reviewing the entire history of 'political correctness', it is worth noting that many commentators, sociologists and historians deny that there is a genuine (positive) movement that could be described in such terms. In 1994, Éric Fassin, echoing the predicted demise of 'political correctness', wrote:

Definition has unfortunately become impossible because of the success of the expression, which nowadays applies to everything from feminism to smoking bans, from multiculturalism to bottle recycling, from deconstruction to health food. ... It is true that, as Calvin Trillin has pointed out, 'when no one was said to be politically correct and when persons regarded as politically correct denied that here was such a thing, 'political correctness' could only be defined by those with an interest in warding off its dangers.' As political correctness is defined in negative terms, like a void, its significance varies depending on usage and users. We have therefore suggested that 'political correctness' be defined, in the words of Claude Levi-Strauss, as a floating signifier.<sup>2</sup>

2. 'Political correctness en version originale et en version française. Un malentendu révélateur', *Vingtième siècle, revue d'histoire*, no. 43, July-September 1994, pp. 30-42.

Floating indeed: for the expression, almost always used accusingly, brandished to mark out the speaker's political incorrectness (and thus political courage and independence), is enrolled both in anti-intellectual arguments and in rhetoric denouncing the evisceration of innovative concepts through codification and institutionalization. When one is subjected to the accusation of 'political correctness', as the Network of Women Philosophers proposes to be in this case, the value of the floating signifier is largely determined by the context of the discourse and the accuser's own position.

Does that simply mean that one person's *praxis* is another person's political correctness in the derogatory sense? There is, in fact, more consistency than meets the eye in the coining of this ironic turn of phrase, whether it is used by the New Left or conservatives in the United States.

Above all, it is a question of power: 'political correctness' originally manifested the extension of an institutional form of power exercised within the universities where sensitivity to linguistic and other subtle forms of discrimination and harassment was first expressed and codified.

In these cases the denunciation of 'political correctness' is tantamount to the denunciation of a political stance and thus of a site of enunciation, more than the discourse itself. Among the New Left and US liberals, concern at the institutionalization of thought suggests that the codification of rules of expression heralds the demise of the concepts involved. On the other side of the spectrum, among US conservatives, 'political correctness' has become synonymous with a largely imagined liberal network whose exaggerated powers are rooted in university institutions, exerting pressure that threatens freedom of thought and expression. The expression concentrates the perceived polarization between free and spontaneous individual enunciation and codified, fixed, retrograde institutional enunciation. This polarization was reflected in an address to students at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor by President George Bush:

Ironically, on the 200th anniversary of our Bill of Rights, we find free speech under assault throughout the United States, including on some college campuses. The notion of political correctness has ignited controversy across the land. And although the movement arises from the laudable desire to sweep away the debris of racism and sexism and hatred, it replaces old prejudices with new ones. It declares certain topics off-limits, certain expressions off-limits, even certain gestures off-limits. What began as a crusade for civility has soured into a cause of conflict and even censorship. Disputants treat sheer force – getting their foes punished or expelled for instance – as a substitute for the power of ideas.<sup>3</sup>

The remarks by President George Bush are striking examples of involuntary irony (and disingenuousness when he points to the inconsistency of the rules of political correctness by claiming that they target only the ‘debris’ of racism and sexism, suggesting that these adversaries have been generally routed). They reveal above all, however, the strategically calculated inversion by the conservative adversaries of ‘political correctness’: strength and abuse of power are specific to ‘political correctness’, and its victims are freedom of expression and thought. Power is indeed at stake here: ‘political correctness’ is portrayed as a monolith of university regulations, and those who wish to continue to use the expressions and gestures rused by George Bush Senior are portrayed as victims. However sceptical one may be about such a biased view of the balance of power, the question remains of whether the codification and institutionalization of rules of conduct aimed at rectifying social relations of power are conducive to a deep-seated change in such balances and imbalances? Conversely, when minority rights activists or feminists are ironic about ‘political correctness’, they seek to highlight instances of committed political thought becoming inoffensive, in the fullest sense, owing to institutionalization (in cultural studies, post-colonial studies and feminist studies at university, for example).

From that standpoint, institutional codes cut off discourses from their sites of enunciation and address matters in absolute terms, thus eliminating questions such as who is speaking to whom, through whom and for whom. By contrast, the Network rests on each member appropriating and re-enunciating its founding concepts.

3. George Bush, 4 May 1991, Remarks at the University of Michigan Commencement ceremony in Ann Arbor, [www.Presidency.ucsb.edu](http://www.Presidency.ucsb.edu).

It therefore cannot be 'politically correct'. That being said, how is the difference between the commonality of discourse and the variety of sites of enunciation negotiated in the women-philosophers' activities, considering the diversity of situations, genealogies of thought and cultures? Could this be a new flashpoint that would signal not the power of conceptualization but the possible inoffensiveness of a network in which the diversity of enunciative spaces makes it impossible to find a common epistemological ground, owing to 'political correctness'?

Feminism and post-colonial criticism are periodically plagued by such recurrent doubts, and few theoretical fields are more haunted by the difficult question of 'Where are you speaking from?'. This question is a natural consequence of the emphasis on representativeness inherent in who speaks for whom. But one error must be avoided, as theorists such as Gayatri Spivak and Sara Suleri<sup>4</sup> are well aware: the error of allowing, through opposition to tainted institutional heritages, the notion of subjective 'life experience' to supplant philosophical grounding; in other words, the error of allowing identity to supplant thought.

It is precisely from the identity standpoint that Terry Eagleton levelled some of his criticism at Gayatri Spivak and her *Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present*<sup>5</sup>, in a review that caused quite a stir (*London Review of Books* 13 May 1999). The review caused as much if not more of a furore than Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's difficult book and was probably as hotly debated as the work itself because it examined, in particular, epistemological problems which we face today which have been Spivak's constant preoccupation, notably the decentring of knowledge and questioning of its figures, sites and canons, through enunciation, style and methodology. What I wish to address here is the confrontation between intellectual traditions revealed by the review and the storm of protests and encouragements that followed; it highlighted differing conceptions of acceptable standards, both in terms of academic language and of conceptual tools. The questions raised of who is speaking, from where, for whom, through whom, how and to whom, and who is listening, are all at the crux of the matter.

4. Gayatri Spivak and Sara Suleri, 'Woman skin deep: feminism and the postcolonial condition', *Critical Inquiry*, summer 1992, pp. 756–769.

5. *Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard U.P., 1999.



Terry Eagleton is a Marxist intellectual and influential academic in the United Kingdom whose works include *Ideology* (1994), *The Idea of Culture* (2000), *After Theory* (2003) and *Trouble with Strangers: a Study of Ethics* (2008). At first sight, his criticism of Spivak is extremely fierce, as foreshadowed by the title 'In the gaudy supermarket'.<sup>6</sup>

First, in one sweeping gesture, he lumps together all post-colonial criticism, upon which he unleashes his sarcasm: there is supposed to be 'a secret handbook' of post-colonial criticism that imposes the same rhetorical and theoretical vacuousness on all of its adepts.

The most interesting criticism concerns the second rule of the so-called handbook: Eagleton caustically states that all self-respecting post-colonial critics are required to cultivate the most obscure style possible. To compound his sarcasm, Eagleton deliberately uses the adjective 'obscurantist' in excoriating both conceptual intention and linguistic form: 'Be as obscurantist as you can decently get away with.' I, for my part, can only agree that style, rhythm and what Eagleton calls 'verbal texture' cannot be extricated from actual conceptualization. However, is there only one English language and one homogeneous readership in implicit agreement on the qualities of such 'texture'? At this point, Eagleton enquires (with obvious scepticism) whether 'this hermetically private idiom' might contribute to the dynamics of decentring Western 'Reason' and thus to the decanonization of an entire line of theoretical genealogy that nonetheless comprises Spivak.

Yet he dismisses this possibility out of hand and concludes that, on the contrary, this relative hermeticism is merely symptomatic of Spivak's institutionalization, the vacuousness of her political message and, ultimately, a sign of her 'dis-empowerment'. The starting point that I propose for this debate is not motivated by a wish to take sides: although there is substantively much to be taken and learned by reading Eagleton, his message is weakened by his own inability to shift his enunciative ground. It would be easy to see this (and many have seen nothing but) as an example of an 'old white male' appalled by the intellectual presumptuousness of a 'non-white female'. Nevertheless, there is much more to be learned from the discussion.

6. Terry Eagleton, 'In the gaudy supermarket', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 21, No. 10, 1999, pp. 3–6.

Eagleton is fully aware of the likely political and poetical value of writing that rejects the straitjacket of philosophical uniformity and linearity ('More charitable readers will see this garrulous hotch-potch as a strike at the linear narratives of Enlightenment, by one whose gender and ethnicity these violently exclude'). In other words, he recognizes, but does not consider seriously, the place of gender and ethnicity in the profound difference of Spivakian language. If Eagleton is unwilling or unable to explore this hypothesis in greater depth, it is because (a) he is not really interested in gender issues; and (b) his real target is 'the gaudy supermarket' of the mind evoked in the title: the commoditization of theories that he identifies with US culture (with which he associates Spivak, a professor at Columbia University).

Like most questions of style, Spivak's obscurantism is not just a question of style. ... its theoretical soundbites ... spring quite as much from the commodified language of the US as they do from some devious attempt to undermine it.

Thus the critic is not in favour of either of these two apparently opposing dynamics: first the commoditization of gaudy but conceptually poor thought whose only power is to be displayed on the shelves of the supermarket of the mind (a display, one imagines, of slogans and watchwords, thus bringing intellectual production within the deleterious realm of 'political correctness' as a depoliticizing codification, for which he vaguely blames 'the US'); and, second, the post-colonial subversion of Eurocentric thought in literally disconcerting rhetorical terms. The implicit accusation here is a serious and interesting one: whether Spivak's particular idiom and eclectic approaches are deemed positive or negative, they are obviously modes of thought and speech that are distinctly private, subjective and extempore, breaking away from academically-sanctioned – and therefore suspect – methodologies. Does this strategy really have a boomerang effect, and does all the subversive energy of such discourse merely reinforce, through its purported unintelligibility, its other original institutional setting, 'the US'?

Eagleton hammers out this point with the support of a quotation, which 'combines the vocabulary of Hegel with the syntax of Hello! Spivak's language, lurching from the high-toned to the streetwise, belongs to a culture where there is less and less middle ground between the portentous and the homespun, the rhetorical and the racy'.

The underlying scorn in Terry Eagleton's remarks is regrettable, because their content should be taken seriously. The critic targets two sites of enunciation which characterize Spivak as a theorist, both an Indian and an academic in an American university; Eagleton suggests that the combination of these two enunciative spaces allows her to produce deliberately unintelligible discourses, as her curriculum vitae frees her from the obligation of theoretical articulation.

Being from 'elsewhere' is therefore viewed as just another commodity in the American 'supermarket' of thought, with each person bearing their own knowledge. Of course, the statement underlying Eagleton's diatribe is that he refuses to be 'politically correct' and to abstain from criticizing Spivak for those reasons. But if one can overlook the outrageousness of his comments, they remain intriguing; is there an involuntary collusion between this non-Western woman, seeking to raise her voice against the dominant linear discourse, and a 'politically correct' establishment that Eagleton conflates with the United States (the fault of 'political correctness' always lies with others), which by abstaining from criticism of such a private idiom warrants its political ineffectiveness and invisibility?

The question of who is speaking, to whom and from where can only be addressed with the question of language and epistemologies within disciplines. They must be addressed, so that women philosophers are not confined to the dubious roles of customers or suppliers in the gaudy supermarket of ideas, or condemned to floating in some institutional 'no woman's land', shielded by a much maligned 'political correctness'.

# **Author and book reviews**

## Mara MONTANARO

There is no establishment of the truth without an essential position of otherness. The truth is never the same. There can be truth only in the form of the other world and the other life.

M. Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*  
Lecture of 28 March 1984.

The first purpose of this article is to analyse the concept of vulnerability as it appears in Judith Butler's discourse on community. Butler analyses this concept through five essays written after 11 September 2001, taken from *Precarious Life*<sup>1</sup>, in which she puts forward a rigorous analysis of the steady distancing of political power from accountability at law, of the collapse of the rule of law and the erosion of sovereignty under the pretext of combating terrorism. This collection is a condensation of the philosopher's current interests, also to be found in her most recent publication in Italy<sup>2</sup> and in *Undoing Gender*, published in 2004.

Critiques of anthropocentrism have made clear that when we speak about human life we are indexing a being who is at once human and living, and that the range of living beings exceeds the human. In a way, the term 'human life' designates an unwieldy combination, since 'human' does not simply qualify 'life' but 'life' relates human to what is nonhuman and living, establishing the human in the midst of this relationality. For the human to be human, it must relate to what is nonhuman, to what is outside itself but continuous with itself by virtue of an interimplication in life. This relation to what is not itself constitutes the human being in its livingness, so that the human exceeds its boundary in the very effort to establish them.

This statement encapsulates the new direction of Butler's philosophical thought: the central aspect of the precariousness of lives, the vulnerability of bodies, the responsibility that binds us to others and our dependence on the recognition of others. What the author describes is a new ontology of the present whose characteristics are indeed fragility, the revelation of oneself to the other, the relational structure:

1. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Londres, New York, Verso, 2004.

2. See Judith Butler, "Vulnerabilità, capacità di sopravvivenza" in *Kainos*, online journal, No. 8, Nudità, 2009.

This last term is decisive, since if the foundations of the subject exist, they reside in the relations that constitute it, stripping it of its traditional foundations. All of us, male or female, are born and live in relations with others, first of all our mothers, and that is what makes singularity not a closed and self-sufficient identity but an opening, and the link with others a necessary rather than an accessory link, and dialogue with the other not a dialogue between an 'I' and a 'you', who are separate and whole, but a suspension of the 'I' and the 'you'.<sup>3</sup>

To the extent that in Butler's view my ability to survive depends on my relations with others – with a 'you' or a group of 'you' without whom I cannot exist, my existence is not wholly within my gift but lies outside myself, in that web of relations that precedes and exceeds the limits of my person. The limit is a key concept as – to paraphrase the author – if I have no limit, or if we posit that I have a limit, only to the extent that I am separated from others can I have a relation with them. Consequently the limit is a function of the relation, a mediation of the difference, a negotiation in which the 'I' is linked to the other in its separateness.

The text published in *Kainos* revisits and complements *Precarious Life* and *A Critique of Ethical Violence*.<sup>4</sup> Butler considers that the political dimension is also a site of reciprocal dependence that entails the risk of vulnerability and loss, and must be carefully evaluated.

This means that each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure.<sup>5</sup>

The question of vulnerability is thus linked to the legitimation of violence in Western culture, and the associated arbitrary decision as to which few lives are worth living, the loss of which gives rise to horror and outrage, which are lacking in other instances. What is the difference between a liveable life and one that does not even attain the threshold of survival? What frameworks of intelligibility allow certain lives to be celebrated and regretted but simultaneously deny other lives access to any visibility or public expression of grief?

3. Ida Dominijanni, 'Le Spinoza Lectures di Judith Butler', *Alias*, 1 October 2006 (our translation)...

4. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself. A Critique of Ethical Violence*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2005.

5. Judith Butler, *Precarious life, op.cit.*, p. 20

Butler proposes that the 'I' should be redefined not as a clearly defined entity but as a reality linked to others. She thus suggests that the concept of expropriation be used as a starting point for reflection on vulnerability.

It is interesting to compare the concept of vulnerability as it features in Judith Butler's discourse on community with *immunitas*, which constitutes the most incisive semantic counterpart to the *communitas* thought by Esposito:

The concept of *immunitas* is essentially a comparative idea: diversity as compared with the condition of others (rather than the extension in itself) is its semantic essence – to the point where one might think that the true antonym of *immunitas* is not the missing *munus* but the *communitas* of those who, conversely, share it. ... *Immunitas* is a condition of the special: whether it applies to an individual or to a group, it is always specific in the sense that it belongs to someone and is therefore not communal.<sup>6</sup>

The theoretical concentration on the category of immunity may be compared to Judith Butler's bid to construct a conceptual language to describe gender and sexuality as modes of relation<sup>7</sup>, or to her frequent reference to immunity whenever the body appears in all its vulnerability.<sup>8</sup>

Butler's oeuvre opens up a number of political problems in that her theory presents a community based on lack, vulnerability, loss and precariousness. What then becomes of self-determination, autonomy, the subject's choice and in particular women's choice? Can that ethical, moral inclination, based on the very lovely image of the movement of 'my breath in the other's breath, with the other, from one to the other', the breath of poetry, really provide an appropriate response to the dramatic and violent prescriptions of contemporary biopolitics based on war? Are conflictual practices considered legitimate in this perspective? How is this ontology of human and emotional interdependence positioned with regard to those prescriptions? And in this viewpoint, what view is taken of the social movements around the world that claim the right to resist – with all the practical implications of that – and what place do they hold?

6. Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas. Protezione e negazione della vita*, Einaudi, Torino, 2002, p. 8.

7. See also J. Revel, *Fare Moltitudine*, Cosenza, Rubbettino, 2004, p. 37.

8. Reflection on the change of what defines a contemporary life might be considered as a line of reference that would support another comparison with Esposito. For lack of time, however, we shall confine ourselves to noting it.

These are the concerns in Judith Butler's works to which we shall seek to respond, inasmuch as 'if one seeks to give a biopolitical response to power, namely, the possibility of a policy as an ontological creation, it is unacceptable for the only response to power over life to be the negation of life itself'<sup>9</sup>, i.e. an ontology of the present marked by fragility, by exposing oneself to the other, by relation.

9. J. Revel, *op. cit.*, p. 44 (our translation).

The second purpose of this article is to question Butler's concept of community by seeking to demonstrate that vulnerability is the key concept of relational ontology that exposes us, in effect relation is necessary as the entry not only in the field of life (and so of policy) but also in time and rests on participation and communication.

Thus the question that arises is this: if 'official historicity' reads in Butler only a thought of the community based on the social dimension of Recognition (despite critical recognition as a practice consisting in seeking recognition not only in terms of existing norms, which are contested, but by expanding norms through practices and modalities with new significations), can Butler be read as a thought of the common whose constitutive engine is the performative act?

The new theories of the body that emerged in the 1990s go beyond the old adage that we should "remember the body". Butler attacks the natural conception of sexual difference, the traditional feminist conception, in other words, that neither gender nor sex is natural. Sex is not natural and neither is the sexed body of "woman", Butler explains, but rather like gender they are performed every day. Like heterosexual or homosexual identity, masculine or feminine identity is above all the product of an iterative mechanism or of discourse citation that reinforces and normalizes those identities, by stabilizing the positioning both of the preferred and of the abject.

For the moment it suffices to recall that the performative act achieves what it says and that its effect is immediate. It is the opposite of the constative act which is confined to observing, to stating something by describing a fact, inasmuch as an utterance



through which an act is accomplished neither describes nor prescribes an action, but effectively enables its accomplishment. Given that Butler's entire oeuvre consistently puts forward a co-implication and a co-presence of the psychic and the socio-symbolic, we may state that her project consists of bringing the psychic and the social into relationship, and of recreating their action according to the modalities of performative subversions.

Austin's<sup>10</sup> definition of the performative act can be discerned at the centre of this idea of performativity, mingled with Derrida's concept of repetition: one of the strengths of the performative power of language resides in its normalization effect. By reiterating meanings, discourse stabilizes them and makes them natural and normal. In performative power language is indeed the norm: it normalizes both the abnormal and the normal; the strength of the symbolic code is determined by Butler in its very capacity for repetition.

Butler maintains that speech is a bodily act: what is said not only passes through the body but also constitutes a means through which the body itself presents itself. Language, Butler writes, comes from the body in the form of an emission: the body thus represents what makes language hesitant, the body bears the signs, the signifiers and the emerging and even unconscious modes. In *Excitable Speech*<sup>11</sup> too, always bearing in mind the oscillation of the performativity theory between a linguistic modality and its almost theatrical presentation, Butler seeks to show that the act of speech is a performative and hence theatrical whole, presented in a public act open to interpretation because it involves a series of effects through its implicit relation with linguistic conventions.

Indeed, the author maintains that if one questions how a linguistic theory of the act of discourse relates to bodily gestures, it is sufficient to think that that same discourse is a bodily gesture with specific linguistic consequences. At this point, one should re-read and refer to Butler's oeuvre to gain a clear understanding of this assertion in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*<sup>12</sup> (a text that was intended almost as a response to *Gender Trouble*) and grasp the extent to which performativity relates not just to the linguistic act but also to the bodily act.

10. J.L., 'Other Minds', 1946, in J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock (eds), *Philosophical Papers*, Oxford University Press, 1961.

11. Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech, A Politics of the Performative*, New York and London, Routledge, 1997.

12. J. Butler, *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, New York/London, Routledge, 1993.

Here she defines the relation between body and language as a chiasmus: i.e. that there is always a dimension of bodily life that cannot be represented, even if it constitutes the condition on which language is activated:

Generally, I follow Shoshana Felman's view in *The Scandal of the Speaking Body* in which she claims, following Lacan, that the body gives rise to language, and that language carries bodily aims, and performs bodily deeds that are not always understood by those who use language to accomplish certain conscious aims. I take it that this is the importance of the transference not only for the therapeutic situation but for the theorization of language that it occasions. We say something, and mean something by what we say, but we also do something with our speech, and what we do, how we act upon another with our language, is not the same as the meaning we consciously convey. It is in this sense that the significations of the body exceed the intentions of the subject.<sup>13</sup>

We now require an analysis of the performative act and of performativity in or of gender, of language, of the body and of 'flesh': this obliges us to retreat from Butler's œuvre to that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose philosophy is 'all the less tied down by political responsibilities to the extent ... it does not take anyone's place (does not play at passions, politics and life, or reconstruct them in imagination) but discloses exactly the Being we inhabit'<sup>14</sup>. In fact, while Judith Butler defines the relation between body and language in chiasmic terms, in Merleau-Ponty's œuvre chiasmus is a key term: the human being is not wholly reduced to the external world by becoming just another product, the relation between the visibility of the world and that invisible dimension made up of relations, energy forces and intensive movements is defined by a chiasmus to the degree that they are not a reciprocal necessity and complementarity. It is therefore impossible to separate one of the two dimensions but, above all, before it relates the subject to the other and to the world, the chiasmus relates the subject with itself, because it is at once the subject and the object, determined and free, individual and common.

The relation between body and language, the idea that what makes language possible is the event, 'the event results from bodies, their mixtures, their actions and their passions'<sup>15</sup>. In Merleau-Ponty's 1945 magnum opus *Phenomenology of Perception*

13. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, *op. cit.*, p.199.

14. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Le langage indirect et les voix du silence", in *Signes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1960, p. 20.

15. Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1969, p. 169.

this is discussed chiefly with reference to the bodily system's power of general expression, of which language itself is considered simply a particular 'modulation'. The creation of language as expression in the sense that Merleau-Ponty attributes to the concept is what enables the coextensive construction of the body-world relation. It is most interesting to relate this to the above-cited claims in Merleau-Ponty's *'Le langage indirect et les voix du silence'* (Indirect language and the voices of silence):

IWe must therefore say the same thing about language in relation to meaning that Simone de Beauvoir says about the body in relation to the mind: it is neither primary nor secondary. No one has ever made the body simply as a means or an instrument, or maintained for example that one can love by principles. And since it is no more true that the body loves all by itself, we may say that it does everything and nothing, that it is and is not ourselves. ... Similarly, language is not meaning's servant, and yet it does not govern meaning. There is no subordination between them. ... What we mean is not before us, outside all speech, as sheer signification. It is only the excess of what we live over what has already been said.<sup>16</sup>

16. M. Merleau-Ponty, *op. cit*, p.103.

Let us conclude by simply noting that what we want to find is creative power in the common and the fields of action of the performative. We find it interesting to contaminate and explore the interweaving between Butler and Merleau-Ponty inasmuch as linguistic effort immediately becomes an ontological and political effort, resistance becomes the production of subjectivity, the problem of the common relates to forms of subjectivation, and power – through its performative nature – not only shapes the subject but also delineates the conditions of its existence, just as language, in its performative power, normalizes it.

## Marie GARRAU

Carol Gilligan's book *In a Different Voice*<sup>1</sup> is generally presented as the founding text of the ethics of care, a current in moral philosophy emphasizing the importance, in order to act morally, of heeding the specific nature of situations in which we find ourselves and taking into account their relational dimension, i.e. how others take part in and may be affected by our actions. It is indeed in this book by a psychologist of moral development, originally published in 1982, that we find the first description of what constitutes the ethics of care and what distinguishes it from the traditional, dominant notion of morality, which Gilligan calls the ethics of justice. The book presents the ethics of care as both a contextual and a relational ethics, in which caring about individual others and maintaining the relations in which we are involved are the priorities from an ethical standpoint. From this point of view, it is differentiated from the ethics of justice, which defines moral action in reference to abstract and general principles to which agents refer when acting, and sees the latter as autonomous rather than connected individuals.

Yet Gilligan's book offers both less and more than a definition of the ethics of care and its relationship with the ethics of justice. It offers less because, apart from some rare moments, Gilligan does not seek to establish a theory about what is a moral action or moral reasoning, any more than she attempts to really define a moral agent. It offers more though because Gilligan makes that different voice heard throughout the book in which the perspective of care is expressed, whose tone and 'theme' contrast with what is usually heard in moral psychology and moral philosophy. She also shows that this voice, which differs by being at odds with classic conceptions of morality, is more often than not the voice of women. Not because women by nature care more and are more aware of others but because traditional moral theory has generally not taken much account of women's point of view and moral experience, when not explicitly disparaging them.

1. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1982.

In order to arrive at her theory, Gilligan analysed how her predecessors and contemporaries in the field of moral psychology had defined moral development, showing how most of them had, in a single movement, discredited the moral voice of women and the perspective of care as expressed by them. Above all though, she gave voice to the women and men of different ages and social backgrounds whom she met and questioned during her research; she describes how they react to hypothetical moral dilemmas such as the classic Heinz dilemma in which a man must choose between letting his sick wife die and stealing the drugs he cannot afford but which his wife cannot live without; she describes how they manage to deal with real-life and often tragic dilemmas, such as whether to have an abortion.

Both the critique of traditional moral theory and the revelation of the ethics of care are based on the methodological choice to stand back in order to listen to what the interviewees have to say and how they say it. What the interviewees, and especially the women, say in fact is that moral questioning cannot take place outside the context in which it is formulated; that taking account of the context and its specificities complicates moral judgement to the point that deciding on the action to be taken is an often long and sometimes painful process; and lastly that caring for others is an ethical requirement which, when understood properly, should not lead to the sacrifice of one's own well-being but to seeking mediation between the self and others.

In this way, reading *In a Different Voice* is not so much an intellectual exercise at the end of which we find out once and for all what the ethics of care is, as an experience during which we get to know that different, hitherto inaudible, voice in which the care perspective is stated. By opening up a space for its expression, Gilligan makes apparent the complexity of moral life which seldom meets the criteria of clarity and simplicity that theory requires. And she puts forward the incredibly liberating theory that contrary to what women have long been told, recognizing such complexity is neither an admission of weakness nor a sign of moral incapacity, but rather the prelude to moral action.

## Sandra LAUGIER

Carol Gilligan's book, *In a Different Voice*, a best-seller in United States, was translated into French as early as 1986, just to be immediately forgotten.<sup>1</sup> It may be the case that the term *différence* as it appears in the French title (*Une si grande différence*) was like a red rag to a bull in a country where any difference is to be rejected on the grounds of its alleged incompatibility with the ideal of equality to which feminist theory itself is subjected.

Twenty-five years later, nothing has changed and the controversy about the 'care' issue has not evolved at all. In France, the usual objection to the ethics of care goes by asserting that far from belonging to feminist theory, it tends to make the distinction between men and women more rigid and of an essential kind through its reference to a moral content: women, in this view, represent attention to others, especially close others, while men emblemize autonomy and impartiality; women are supposed to be associated to domestic activities while men are to take part in active life; women stand on the private side while men belong to public life. The so-called ethics of care,<sup>2</sup> by emphasizing the social, moral and political importance of qualities such as attention to others and caring activities would only reinstall and confirm such stereotypic views. Such a polemic can be viewed as an exemplification of how the French male-dominated political and/or academic world usually reacts to issues relating to feminism: by opposing a 'correct' version of feminism, a legitimate and true one, to minor ones – a process in which academics are happy to help by providing arguments for politicians. Such a phenomenon, as already observed in other issues where questioning the reference to feminism would have been appropriate, violently struck at the ethics of care, accused of indulging in a bird-brained view of femininity.<sup>3</sup>

1. C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1982; French trans. S. Laugier, *Une si grande différence*, Paris, Flammarion, 1986, and 2008.

2. '*L'éthique du care*' in the original. Although 'care' in its ordinary meaning can be translated by '*soin*', the word 'care' is kept untranslated when referring to the ethics of care as a theory (translator's note).

3. See Médiapart: <http://www.mediapart.fr/club/blog/sandra-laugier/210410/politique-du-care-contre-societe-du-soin> and <http://blogs.mediapart.fr/blog/sandra-laugier/200610/yes-we-care>

As if in recent years sexism had been focusing on the idea of care, several attacks could be registered; for example, Michel Onfray, in a paper for *Le Monde*, advised 'women' that they should re-read their 'classics'; similarly, officially established feminists who are used to manipulating ambient misogyny advocated against the ethics of care viewed as maternal while the few women in the government took a stand 'against' the ethics of care and 'for' republican equality; not to mention the ironic and demagogic tone adopted by politicians on the 'left' when alluding to a 'care society'.

The ethics of care hits at a sensitive point in the nexus of social and gender relations, especially in France where the main hindrance to legitimating feminism is a universalistic background along with its differentialistic companion. Polemics about the care issue relate to a general trait of the intellectual and even academic life in France where a large difference can be observed between the quality of social and generally speaking critical thought and its lack of development when it comes to feminist matters. Objections to the ethics of care, as they are produced in that specific space at the intersection of intellectual and political worlds, only exhibit a national weakness in public feminist thought exemplified by the low level of credibility attributed to research in the field. Criticism of the care issue only expresses the contempt in which a whole field of human activity is held in our society, even among women. A further instance of a situation where academic researches are validated or devalued according to the value attached to their object.

### The ethics of care: subverting morals

One of the main results gained through the ethics of care is that morals have become plural. This is a crucial, and most revolutionary, point in Gilligan's work, as initiated in *In a Different Voice* and carried on in *The Deepening Darkness*.<sup>4</sup> The idea that there exist feminine morals is so provocative, and at the same time so obvious, that its feminist origin is usually silenced. Through this idea, what is asserted is that there exists another form of morals, a different voice, present in everyone; this voice is neglected precisely because

4. Carol Gilligan, David A.J. Richards, *The Deepening Darkness: Patriarchy, Resistance and Democracy's Future*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge U.P., 2009.

in the first place and from an empiricist point of view, it is the voice of women referring to activities that appear as feminine because they are usually restricted to women. The ethics of care, it should be recalled, is based on an analysis of those historical conditions that favoured a division of moral labour in which care activities were socially AND morally depreciated. That women, as is historically established, were assigned to the domestic sphere did reinforce the rejection of those activities and concerns out of the public sphere, which was highly valued by socially superior men and women. The whole domain of domestic activities has thus been surreptitiously undervalued as lacking a proper political and moral scope. The ethics of care therefore appears as contesting the legitimacy of moral, social and political philosophies, in their main practice.

The ethics of care, by explicitly asserting that other morals can be envisaged, opened a new field of investigation and speculation where the two moral voices are equally put at par: a morality centred on equity, impartiality and autonomy, as has been valued by a whole tradition of thought which is eventually characterized as masculine, on the one hand; a morality articulated by a 'different voice', mostly experienced by women, based on the preservation and care of human relations, on the other hand. The latter requires that specific situations be accounted for; it requires, in Gilligan's words, 'a mode of thought more contextual and narrative than formal and abstract'.

By insisting on this difference, Carol Gilligan did not intend to introduce an essential difference; she rather aimed at making evident our common prejudices concerning moral issues and how a different voice is silenced inside all of us. Gilligan's works induced a shift in moral philosophy by contesting the monopoly of justice, as a concept John Rawls had installed in the field of morals.

The different-voice's revolution occurs when Gilligan introduces in her account Amy's voice. Amy, as is becoming well known, is a girl aged 11. She is confronted, along with a boy, Jake, about the same age, with the so-called Heinz dilemma: either steal some medicine badly needed by Heinz's dying wife or let her die. According to Jake, Heinz should steal the drug:



saving his wife's life must be given first priority; therefore he is entitled to robbery. Amy's answer to the dilemma is different, suggesting that there might be other ways out of it, without any robbery; Heinz might borrow money, for example; not only that, what is the use to Heinz's wife, she argues, if he goes to jail? Heinz must not commit robbery and his wife must not die. Amy suggests that Heinz and his wife talk to each other in order to find a solution. Jake and Amy are representative of the view according to the ethics of justice and that of the ethics of care, respectively. Amy's moral judgement relies on attention being given to all specificities of the problem. Her worldview is made of interwoven human relations the thread of which builds a coherent whole, and not of isolated independent individuals whose relations are governed by systems of rules.

From the dominant ethical point of view, the moral value of Amy's thought is less than Jake's – even null. The ethics of care is revolutionary in the sense that it forces us to include in what we judge as moral, in the morals itself, in the heart of it, such a voice as Amy's. The ethics of care claims that the two voices, Amy's and Jake's, should stand on the same equal footing. Amy's voice, because it sounds (briefly or permanently) in each of us – man and woman – represents such a provocative claim.

### The ethics of care: subverting politics

The concept of 'care', as one of critical politics, questions the true meaning to be given to morals and politics when grasped by a specific position. Carole Pateman addressed this difficult issue, a few years after Gilligan and following a different direction, in a book whose title speaks for itself: *The Sexual Contract*.<sup>5</sup> Pateman radicalizes the idea that is at the basis of the ethics of care – that predominant ethics, with their articulation to politics, and more specifically to past and present theories of 'contract', are produced by and express the very idea of 'patriarchy', which uses them as tools in submitting women to its power. Similarly, ethics and politics, as they appear in philosophical speculations, are mere translations of social practice in its devaluation of labour and attitudes relating to the idea of care – thus restricting priority to the corresponding jobs for women, poor people and migrants.

5. Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Cambridge UK, Polity Press, 1988.

Viewing care as socially, morally and politically important thus implies a reference to 'women' as a category to which the labour associated with care has been specifically restricted and assigned. As speaking of 'women' means introducing a suspected category (as is any theory assuming that such a category does exist), Gilligan's approach was quickly considered as 'essentialist'. The mere immediacy of such a characterization in the French context does in itself point to the existence of prejudices impeaching any critical thought on the predominant character of the common view on morals. Referring to universality, a common and constant practice in France, results, as Christine Delphy<sup>6</sup> has repeatedly emphasized, in omitting that universalism is a project, not a reality, therefore denying gender inequalities.

6. Christine Delphy, *Un universalisme si particulier*, Paris, Syllepse, 2010.

The ethics of care brings us back to such a claim for more realism, in the sense given to this word in Cora Diamond's *The Realistic Spirit*,<sup>7</sup> meaning the necessity to see what lies just under one's eyes: the reality of inequalities. Reflections on care bring morals back to its proper domain, that is to say our practice – in the way Wittgenstein wants to bring words from their metaphysical use to their daily use, where they do mean something to us. If something like morals exists, then it can be seen not in a set of preexisting rules that can be listed nor in a moral reality but in the mere immanence of situations, affects and practices. No 'care' without the expression of everyone's voice: here lies the importance of a different voice. What Gilligan did establish is that the language of justice cannot account for the pertinence of women's experiences and points of view – these experiences and the moral perspectives they produce being disqualified as deficient or marginal. If the possibility that women might be morally deficient is excluded, then the hypothesis that there exists a 'different voice' must be taken seriously, along with that of a moral orientation identifying and treating moral problems in another way, different from that implied by the language of justice. Analyses of things in terms of care are devoted to such an objective of articulation and clarification.

7. Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind*, Montgomery, Vt., Bradford Books, 1991.

One should now ask the question: how is it that Gilligan's approach has been considered as 'essentialist'? Gilligan has clearly shown the generality of her approach: justice and care are two different tonalities, or rival voices, existing inside each of us, the care voice being less inhibited in girls than in boys. As Gilligan insisted in a recent lecture (2009):

... care and caring are human concerns not restricted to women. Its uncompromising appearance cannot be understood without explicit reference to the care / justice debate. The real question is: how questions of justice and rights interfere with questions of care and responsibility.

The notion of 'care', inasmuch as it covers very practical activities and a form of sensitivity, a sustained attention to others and a sense of responsibility and dependence, breaks with theories of impartial justice. The theory of care does not aim at installing pity, compassion, solicitude and benevolence as subsidiary values that would lessen the hardness of a cold conception of social relations, an impartial conception of justice based on the primacy of rights attributed to autonomous, separate, rational individuals. Such a description would better suit what is called solicitude, that is to say, care from the perspective of justice or as it appears in that political discourse whose target it has been since its appearance.

### Care: feminist subversion

In France, the diagnosis as far as feminism is concerned is that of delayed development, mainly due to the backward state of the intellectual class. In other words, the state of delayed development of French feminism is the form taken by male domination in the intellectual field. Mocking American theories for their excesses is frequent among French academics, insisting on the alleged differentialism of American thought, a plea against which France would bravely oppose such national principles as fraternity, equality and universality. These notions systematically asserted in discussions on the care issue are viewed as of a superior kind to which any feminist thesis should be submitted, without any critical reflection referring to their masculine wording ('fraternity').

This could explain why in the conventional discourse on 'soin'<sup>8</sup> and 'sollicitude' that attempts to replace the ethics of care, as opened up by Tronto<sup>9</sup> and Gilligan, in the contemporary controversy, any reference to the feminist dimension of the problem is systematically repressed. The debate on the care issue probably appears in some quarters as the long-expected opportunity for attacking feminism through feminism itself. There is nothing new in this manoeuvre, which consists in eroding the radical aspect of the notion of care and buffing its novelty by reformulating it in familiar terms. As in assertions like these: since the care issue has already been taken into account through the idea of solidarity without any reference to any feminist perspective, there is no use introducing this perspective into the problem; or a doctrine such as the ethics of care, overloaded as it is with 'feelings' originating in the restricted space of family, can only be of a minor theoretical value when compared to theories relating to 'real' ethical and political problems, those that are taken into account in public life.

Critics of the ethics of care rely on a misinterpretation of the idea of care, thought as allegedly referring to that other idea that women's natural position is one of sacrifice and abnegation. The ethics of care precisely excludes this sort of essentialist view. It is ironic that the ethics of care can be accused of not asserting what it has been really asserting from the beginning – equality. Real and true equality, not that theoretical equality that goes with citizenship, for instance. The ethics of care is subverting the predominant way of addressing two important complementary issues: civic equality (women are equal to men by definition of their common status of 'citoyen français'; therefore claiming specific rights for women is pointless, as women already have those rights); and the so-called 'mérite républicain' (every citizen of the Republic should be treated according to their merits – meaning that women should not be favoured as such, no quotas, no positive discrimination as it would go against equal rights for all).

As many feminists have asserted, but none so empirically established as Gilligan's, criteria defining what is right or wrong, what should be valued or disdained (criteria for morals and quality), appear under the guise of universalism while they in fact

8. As already mentioned, the word 'care' is not translated into French when it refers to the 'American' doctrine under this name. But there is a word for 'care' as used in ordinary language: 'soin'. The word for solicitude in French is 'sollicitude' (with a double l) (translator's note).

9. Joan Tronto, *Un monde vulnérable*, Paris, La Découverte, 2009.

are those of a patriarchal society; they are masculine criteria in the sense that the values they promote are those forged by masculine domination in order to ensure this domination. Gilligan's strength is in her moral epistemology, in exhibiting how much gender-oriented our judgements are, when it comes to morals, value and intellectual matters. The ethics of care thus brings feminism back to its origin: equality. One of the problems we have to face in France – the issue is that of inequality among women – is how universalism serves as an argument and a pretext, in order to make feminism compatible with social contempt (I could do it alone and others should be able to do the same). This argument underlies all sorts of stands (against quotas, against positive discrimination, etc.) often taken by women themselves. As a matter of fact, the question raised by the ethics of care is that unpleasant one of inequalities among women.

Once more, the ethics of care serves as revealing an occulted question. The autonomy gained by some women – those who speak in the name of women – through work and through the increase in possibilities to have children taken care of, was obtained in a masculine way, if I may say so. I mean that this autonomy was gained not by a transfer of domestic charges in the direction of men, nor by an equal share of those, but by putting other women to work, at the service of women. I'm not going to indulge in easy ironical words about these women who have become employers, all the more so as they still have the moral and administrative burden of employing someone at home. I'd rather insist on the fact that once more we have to look at what is right under our noses: tasks relating to care, traditionally handled by women, still exist, even if in our privileged Western countries these tasks are handled by others, inasmuch as we can afford it. The fact that these tasks are undertaken by immigrants just adds to the moral devaluation of the idea of 'care'.

### Care: subverting autonomy

The reason why questions relating to the ethics of care become part of the 'public debate' today has to do with the crisis undergone by traditional ways of 'taking care' due to a massive eruption of women onto the labour market. In any case, whether provided inside the domestic sphere or by public institutions or by the market, care is nowadays provided by women whose social status is still insecure: nurses, home helps, health visitors, social workers, etc., not to mention all these jobs relating to care that are all the more devalued in so far as they are being occupied by women, such as teachers, family doctors, etc. The crisis in care affects at the same time the traditional caregivers who work more as people live longer, those whose working conditions are more and more arduous due to cuts in social politics and the geographical redistribution of care facilities, in favour of rich countries and at the expense of poor ones.<sup>10</sup>

This is to remind us of the importance of taking into account care and service (delegated work) simultaneously. 'Service', or rather 'servitude', as Geneviève Fraisse explains in her book *Femmes toutes mains*.<sup>11</sup> The social (and global) division of labour relating to care being as it is, activities relating to care might be divided into two parts: 'emotional care' – affectionate care given to particular people, an activity for white bourgeois women; and 'care as a service', to be bought and delegated, dirty work to be left to 'others'. In France, political support for 'care' may be restricted to the first option.

Here are the limits of any discourse valuing care: the discovery of vulnerability, or again the empowerment of caregivers. Almost nobody would choose to give that second kind of care if he (or she) can avoid it; certainly not those politicians and intellectuals who praise a 'société du soin' (a caring society) without bothering who is going to provide, organize and fund, such a care that they claim to be a right due to (French) citizens. One should question the meaning of such a vulnerability that everybody feels as

10. See Patricia Paperman and Sandra Laugier, *Le Souci des autres. Éthique et politique du care*, Paris, EHESS, 2005 ; Evelyn Nakano Glenn in Pascale Molinier et al., *Qu'est-ce que le care?* Paris, Payot, 2009.

11. Geneviève Fraisse, *Service ou servitude : essai sur les femmes toutes mains*, Lormont, Le Bord de l'eau, 2009.

a care-receiver but refuses to acknowledge in caregivers. These are questions that have never reached the level of public debate; at stake are not just care and protection as such, but politics. The voices that ethics of care has made audible are not only women's voices; they are the voices of all subalterns, all socially disadvantaged categories, ethnicized and racialized, to which the labour of care has been attributed in history.

The ethics of care makes it clear that we depend on others in a world that values autonomy so highly. The ethics of care does not aim at enlisting pity and compassion, solicitude or benevolence, in the category of subaltern virtues dedicated to soothing an unsympathetic conception of social relations, or (which amounts to the same) installing domination under the cover of protection. The ethics of care aims at the acknowledgment of a whole portion of common life systematically ignored in political discourse. Care is what makes a common life possible. Joan Tronto and Berenice Fischer<sup>12</sup> suggest that care should be defined at the most general level as a generic activity meaning all we do in order to perpetuate and repair our 'world', so that we can live in it as well as possible. This 'world' includes our bodies, our environment, and ourselves as elements we try to assemble in a complex and life-sustaining network.

This new attention is aimed at ordinary life. Standard ethics, and political analysis, when they deal with the social contract and the foundation of 'our' society, do not enquire how such a society is made sustainable, carefully expunging from ethics the world of fundamental care, and more generally speaking, all those actions that make ordinary social relations possible. Ignoring the care issue in theoretical ethics and politics amounts to ignoring the origin of what makes a society exist and perpetuate itself. This leads to a radical incompleteness of the politics, to a problematic heterogeneity between the society and its moral dimension through which it is perpetuated. The care theory formulates the recognition of what constitutes our (subjective) ordinary life.

12. Berenice Fischer and Joan Tronto, 'Toward a feminist theory of caring', in E. Abel and M. Nelson (eds), *Circles of Care*, Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press, 1991.

## Françoise BALIBAR

This is the question I asked myself on reading the texts sent for publication to the online *Women Philosophers' Journal*, review of the International Network of Women Philosophers recently created and sponsored by UNESCO.

I was already intrigued by the way in which the call for papers in the introductory issue of the journal had been drafted, particularly by the wording of the first theme that the network's constituent assembly had invited future contributors to reflect upon:

This theme intends to explore the different forms and strategies of resistance and/or avoidance that women philosophers have adopted to overcome *the obstacles they encounter during their careers as philosophers* (my italics).

Having participated – without going very far, I regret to say – in the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s, I recall the endless discussions on the obstacles encountered by women presumptuous enough to wish to think; obstacles not to the development of their careers but linked rather to the very nature of thought and knowledge production, as fashioned by centuries of masculine monopoly.

Reading some of the texts received, it suddenly dawned on me that the reason why this question that so preoccupied us is no longer topical has to do with the fact that the difficulties we pondered are today no longer regarded as difficulties specifically linked to the gender divide (or, as we said at the time, sexual difference), but are viewed in a much broader context as normal and healthy reactions to the hegemony of male, white, Western culture, for centuries masquerading as universality whereas it in fact derives from only a small fraction of humanity.



Reflecting further on the question, it likewise dawned on me – but this is perhaps very presumptuous – that credit for the present state of affairs (with which I am not entirely happy, as I go on to say) should go to the feminism of the 1970s and 1980s: I like to think that if the ‘daughters of educated men’ (in the words of Virginia Woolf) had not rebelled against what they saw as an abuse of power, then their brothers, friends and lovers – the ‘sons of educated men’ – would not have noticed anything and would have continued to do like their dads. The feminist movement (defined, in the urgency of its early years, as a movement of emancipation, of liberation) has played a great and possibly unequalled role in reshaping politics, opening up new horizons and promoting a conception of the world running counter to the totalizing vision prevalent up to the end of the last century.

That being said, I am not entirely happy with the current situation; I do not think it is right, theoretically, to dilute the claims of women qua female gender – while recognizing that gender difference does not coincide with the civil status distinction between men and women, that femininity is not the prerogative of women and that the duality imposed by this reductive dichotomy does not correspond to any reality – in the vast multicultural entity with which contemporary received wisdom seems to be satisfied. Psychoanalysis, after all, does not allow us to view sexuality as a merely cultural factor.

If I am not content with the current situation, in which women come into the category of ‘others’, even ‘significant others’, it is also because the demands of the feminists, at a time when feminism was a movement combining thought and action, rather than a single-issue pressure group, are far from having been made redundant by the ‘evolution of minds’. It makes me furious in this connection to see people so easily satisfied with a job half done. While some men are now able to change nappies and do the washing up, are they really interested in the intellectual production of their female contemporaries? And do they see in the expression of another form of universalism anything more than a documentary on how ‘they’, as ‘others’, live and think?

There exists today a particularly perverse manner of interesting oneself in the intellectual productions of women, which is similar to the way in which anthropologists enrich their understanding and knowledge of indigenous (or, to be politically correct, non-Western) customs. In the end, women do not escape their nurturing role: they feed the thought, they nourish the notion of a world in which one half prides itself that it is no longer ignorant of the other half. The fact that control of the world still remains in the hands of the first half is all too obvious; one only has to see how women's intellectual output is very quickly put to one side and 'right in its place' when it is a question of stumping up hard cash to finance its production. There is thus a strong temptation, particularly in times of crisis, to relegate women's work to the background, on the grounds that it is not saleable, not cash-convertible, or does not meet the international Shanghai classification standards, or I know not what!

In these circumstances, it is worth asking what the relationship is between a review such as the *Women Philosophers' Journal* and 'feminism'. The very title makes it clear that women philosophers remain philosophers whose particularity is to be women. Can these women philosophers avoid asking themselves the question that exercised feminists in the 1970s and 1980s, of what it is in philosophy and science themselves that continues to hinder the exercise of thought by women as women? To put the question in another way: how far and in what spheres has the intellectual activity of feminists over the last thirty years modified both the form and construction of knowledge?

The approach of Donna Haraway, who over the last thirty years has tried to reform no less than Science itself (with a capital S, pure and empirical science) and has managed to avoid the fate of so many enterprises consigned to the obscurity of indifference, merits examination – even it is too early to determine what, thanks to her, has (or has not) changed.

Donna Haraway's outstanding achievement is to be today regarded, 'without question,' as 'America's most gifted postmodern cultural critic,'<sup>1</sup> despite her 'eccentricities' – or rather, without regard to those 'eccentric' accounts<sup>2</sup> with which she regales her reader. In her recent work, apart from her stand in the debate on the human animal/nonhuman animal distinction, what has attracted most attention is the theory that may be termed 'technophile feminist,'<sup>3</sup> of which the 'cyborg metaphor' is the emblematic feature, a token of contemporary subjectivity, abolishing a number of abstract and unrealistic dualities, such as machine/human, male/female, nature/culture and human/non human animal.<sup>4</sup> Rather than on this topical aspect of her thought, I concern myself here with Donna Haraway's earlier work, of which her recent writings are the prolongation. I focus on two texts: one dating from 1997 entitled *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium. FemaleMan©\_Meets\_OncoMouseTM*;<sup>5</sup> and the other, an article published in *Feminist Studies* in 1988,<sup>6</sup> one of her earliest 'feminist' texts. The main theme of these two texts is the critique of science, which is therefore not without interest to philosophers since science and philosophy have always maintained close and reciprocal relations, each seeing itself mirrored in the gaze of the other, whether in terms of self-recognition or self-differentiation.

In 1988, Donna Haraway – a working scientist (she holds a doctorate in biology) as well as an activist within the movement she defines as 'socialist-feminist' ('socialist' in the American sense) – questioned the relevance of the concept of objectivity. The meaning of the word is ambiguous and the concept is used fairly loosely: in conceptual terms, the word designates 'the quality of that which exists in itself, independently of the thinking subject,' whereas in common usage the word is virtually synonymous with impartiality. Twentieth-century epistemology, having grasped the importance of the principles of invariance (of which the relativity principle is but one example), elevated the concept of objectivity into a characteristic of modern (post-Galilean) science. Indeed, as emphasized by Poincaré

1. Biographical note in Amazon.com.

2. An example: 'Ms Cayenne Pepper [the name of the dog] continues to colonize all my cells ... I bet if you checked our DNA, you'd find some potent transfections between us. Her saliva must have the viral vectors. Surely, her darter-tongue kisses have been irresistible.

3. The expression is from Rosi Braidotti, in *La philosophie... là où on ne l'attend pas*, Paris, Larousse, coll. « Philosophe », 2009, p. 80.

4. Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, New York, Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003 ; *When species meet*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, coll. « Posthumanities », 2008.

5. Donna Haraway, *Modest\_witness@second\_millennium. FemaleMan©\_Meets\_OncoMouseTM: Feminism and Technoscience*, New York/London, Routledge, 1997.

6. Donna Haraway, 'Situated knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective', *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 575–599.

(among others), the conceptual definition of the word 'objectivity' implies that 'what is objective must be common to several minds, and, by the same token, can be conveyed by one mind to another'.<sup>7</sup>

Thus modern science, basing itself on the relativity principle ('there exist equivalent viewpoints on the world'), corresponds fully to this requirement: to posit as a matter of principle the existence of equivalent viewpoints is to affirm that putative 'observers' corresponding to these viewpoints can agree on the fact that their observations, although not identical, bear on the same 'object', which is therefore 'common' to them, to borrow the adjective chosen by Poincaré.<sup>8</sup> This somewhat technical clarification seems to me necessary to understand what follows and to appreciate the daring of Donna Haraway's gesture in 1988.

Let it be said at once that this daring does not consist in attacking the objectivity of science. The Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK) programme, coming after the global tide of opposition to the 'scientifically' conducted war in Viet Nam, had already punctured the pretensions of Western science – the kind taught worldwide and on which technological and industrial development has rested for three centuries, Western science made universal – to be uniquely inspired by the concern for truth. Analysing everyday scientific practice 'agnostically', researchers attached to the SSK programme had no difficulty in exposing, beneath the noble motives, the influence of the power game. In particular, analysis of the discursive practices of science revealed how far the famous consensus within the scientific 'community' – a 'clear' guarantee of the objectivity of scientific findings – was in no way transparent as it was manufactured through rhetorical techniques of persuasion developed, perfected and adapted since the seventeenth century.<sup>9</sup> There can be no doubt that despite the resistance of many philosophers and scientists to such iconoclastic ideas, which were easily taxed with relativism, scientific objectivity appeared at the end of the 1980s much more dubious than previously thought.

7. Henri Poincaré, *The Value of Science: Essential writings of Henri Poincaré*, Stephen Jay Gould (ed.), New York, The Modern Library, 2001. Poincaré added 'and since such transmission cannot be brought about in any other way than by the "discourse" ... no discourse, no objectivity'.

8. Science and objectivity have so much in common that G. Canguilhem could affirm: 'there is no objectivity other than scientific knowledge', which is equivalent to saying that the expression 'scientific objectivity' is pleonastic.

9. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1985.

While others were engaged in reassembling the fragments of the broken idol (seeking to protect science from possible 'bias' liable to impede the search for truth)<sup>10</sup>, or in explicating what distinguishes science from the pseudo-sciences or ideology, the audacity of Donna Haraway consisted in (1) identifying the origin of the trouble in objectivity of science in an unexpected source: at the very heart of what was still called sexual difference and would soon be termed the feminine/masculine gender divide; and (2) daring to proclaim that science could be other than it is, that it represents a mode of approach to the real world that is doomed to failure, and even perhaps to disaster.

It should be remembered that this was the time (1980s) that began to see the emergence within the feminist movement of the affirmation of a collective feminine subjectivity, accepted as such, as subjectivity. Donna Haraway saw the challenging of scientific objectivity as an opportunity for a change of scientific paradigm: the abandonment within science itself (and consequently in all spheres of thought) of the ideal of scientific objectivity and its replacement by a diversity of subjectivities affirmed as (necessarily) partial. Donna Haraway introduced in this regard the expression 'situated knowledges', a kind of linguistic hybrid allying the word 'knowledge', hitherto reserved in principle for the idea of scientific knowledge, with the qualifier 'situated', the very negation of the idea of independence in relation to the point of view implied by the notion of objectivity. In opposition to the decontextualized, univocal,<sup>11</sup> coherent knowledge of the scientific ideal, Donna Haraway proposes a form of knowledge that is voluntarily incoherent, dispersed and explicitly subjective. She has no problem in pointing out that characterizing knowledge of this type is much more difficult than ordinary scientific knowledge – if only because of the need to include in the description of situated knowledge, alongside characterization of the 'object' of this knowledge, a precise description of

10. Donna Haraway: 'We wanted a way to go beyond showing bias in science (that proved too easy anyhow)', 'Situated knowledges: the science question ...', *op. cit.*, p. 579.

11. I do not think that univocity is what characterizes scientific knowledge: the key word with regard to scientific objectivity, as defined by means of the principles of invariance, is not equality (the Same), as Donna Haraway seems to think, but rather equivalence.

the modalities of its contextualization.<sup>12</sup> It is not surprising, in these circumstances, that the Kantian object / subject distinction, the very foundation of the epistemology of modern science, ends up by becoming blurred, or more precisely, confused.

This is a key point in the philosophy of Donna Haraway: true, she is constantly rooting out occurrences of the familiar dichotomies in Western thought (man/machine, human/nonhuman, man/woman, object/subject, etc.); but her aim is not to erase the frontiers delimited by these designations; it is rather to affirm the need for free movement on both sides and, even more, the absence of house arrest on either side: the fact of not being on one side or the other.<sup>13</sup> This leads her quite naturally to propose a new form of objectivity, one that is more demanding, 'stronger' (because more fragile) than scientific objectivity, one that she moreover does not hesitate to describe as 'strong'.<sup>14</sup>

From the point of view of strong objectivity, reliable, partially, shareable, trope-laced, worldly, accountable, non-innocent knowledge can be a fragile human achievement. But from the stance of the god trick of scientific creationism, only fetishism – the culture of no culture, the language of no language, the trope of no trope, the one self-referential word, is possible<sup>15</sup>.

This quotation, like many others, highlights the importance given by Donna Haraway to language in this mutation of knowledge that she advocates. She speaks jestingly of this attachment to language as a neurosis, her personal neurosis, 'like all neuroses, [mine is] rooted in the problem of metaphor, that is, the problem of the relation of bodies and language'.<sup>16</sup> Precisely, in the scientific conception of the world – the observation is a commonplace – real bodies are eliminated from the discourse, for the reason that it derives from no-one because it is not situated and is assimilated to the discourse of God: the subject exists in front of the object like God in front of the world. The height of megalomaniac delirium one is tempted to say, over-hastily. But Donna Haraway, who – as will have been seen – is too well versed in psychoanalytic

12. *Modest\_witness...*, *op.cit.*, p. 112.

13. See Thierry Hoquet, 'Insaissable Haraway', *Sociologie et sociétés*, Vol. XVII, No. 1, spring 2010, pp. 143–168; on this subject, in particular, p. 151.

14. Donna Haraway seems to have found in Niels Bohr (one of the 'founding fathers' of quantum theory) matter for reflection on situated knowledge and strong objectivity: 'Bohr is crucial to understanding how an observation and agencies of observation cannot in principle or in practice be independent. All measurements depend on embodied choices of apparatus, conditions for defining and including some variables and excluding others' (*Modest\_Witness...*, *op. cit.*, p. 116). Compare (for example) Bohr's statement: 'To speak as is often done of the disturbance of a phenomenon by observation, or even of the creation, by processes of measurement, of physical attributes to objects, can be misleading ... It is more in keeping with the structure of the theory to reserve the word "phenomenon" to the understanding of the effects observed under given experimental conditions' (N. Bohr, *Physique atomique et connaissance humaine*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. Folio / Essais 1991, p. 519).

15. *Modest\_witness...*, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

16. 'Situated knowledges: the science question ...', *op. cit.*, p. 578.

theory<sup>17</sup> to allow herself such solecisms, speaks of 'fetishism' to describe the mode of thought of traditional science.

Indeed, she turns to account Freud's theory of fetishism based on the fear of castration and consequently restricted to the sole case of the development of the male subject. Not without reservations, as one can imagine, since she is not interested in the subject imagined by Freud (distinguishing male from female, but being concerned only by the small boy) but in the person she herself defines: 'By subject I mean the multilayered person discursively constituted through the material-semiotic practices of molecular genetics, or techno-science more broadly'.<sup>18</sup> What interests her in the process described by Freud is essentially the link that he establishes between fetishism and a strange and unstable form of confusion between knowledge and belief. Commenting on the text in which Freud explains that one of the possible ways of calming the small boy's distress at the idea that he could be castrated, as he conceives his mother to be, is to find himself a substitute penis, a fetish, Donna Haraway writes: 'fetishism has to do with a special kind of balancing act between knowledge and belief ... The fetishist knows and does not know that the fetish is not what it must be to allay the anxiety of the all-too-castrable subject.'<sup>19</sup>

Now the fact of knowing and not knowing that what one believes to be a real object is not a real object is arguably the very situation in which the subjects of classical science find themselves, constantly asking whether that of which they speak has a genuine relationship to reality, to the extent of having invented this rather surprising (when one thinks about it) concept of 'physical reality' (in the case of physics). Pursuing this line of investigation, Donna Haraway ends up by being convinced (and perhaps with her reader such as I myself was) that science (thought, philosophy, as generally practised) derive from a symbolic structure analogous to that by which Freud explains fetishism. She goes so far as to designate all her colleagues wedded to this kind of (doubtful!) practice constituted by the traditional exercise of thought by the generic term 'the fetishist'. Thus she writes: 'The fetishist who is deeply invested in the switch, against the knowledge of the actual complexity and embeddedness of all objects ...

17. In which respect she is well representative of the feminist movement of the 1970s: in the United States as in Europe, psychoanalysis has significantly contributed to the development of feminist thought. (It is hard to imagine how it could be otherwise). In 'Situated knowledges: the science question', Donna Haraway acknowledges her debt to the psychoanalytical current associated with '*object relations theory*', which, she says, was more useful to her in understanding the nature of relationships of subordination than anything Marx and Engels ever wrote. The adherents of this current, in which Winnicott may be included, underlined the role played in the formation of the subject by intersubjective relations; attaching great importance to interpersonal exchanges, they empirically established a link between domination and masculinity.

18. *Modest\_Witness, op. cit.*, p. 297 (note 15). Donna Haraway does not accept at face value the Freudian theory of the role of infant sexuality in the formation of the subject: 'Subject formation is a lifelong matter ... The question still remains whether the psychoanalytic account can be invoked for process that bear precious little if any relation to the traumas of subject formation in psychosexual linguistic development that Freud thought he was talking about'.

19. *Modest\_witness, op. cit.*, p. 144.

ends up by believing in the code of codes [an allusion to the genetic code and to reification of the gene], the book of life [for others, it was the book of nature, written in mathematical characters], and even the search for the grail [the truth].<sup>20</sup>

20. *Idem*, p. 145.

Even if one does not subscribe completely to the ironically provocative theses of Donna Haraway, we have to recognize that she allows us to glimpse the possibility of a change of tone in the analysis of the domination exercised by the masculine gender in the intellectual sphere. No more acrimonious and paranoid recriminations of the kind 'they do everything they can to prevent us from entering their exclusive preserve; they put spokes in our wheels; the proof is that they "forget" to install women's toilets in their institutions'. If science (and consequently philosophy and perhaps even the exercise of thought in general) is 'hostile' to women, it is not because it is 'predominantly' practiced by individuals of the male sex; it is rather because science is thoroughly fetishist in nature, reflecting the fear of castration, the horror of an imagined loss of integrity, identified by Freud as the very essence of masculinity; in short, if one follows Freud, science is inherently 'masculine' – and as such is 'hostile' to women whose constitution as subject obeys other laws.

But is one obliged to follow Freud on this last point?<sup>21</sup> The fact that Freud identifies this particular form of 'balancing act between belief and knowledge', which is the signature of fetishism, with the (dis)possession of the 'phallus' ('that signifier of creative wholeness and power') is his concern. As a woman and feminist, Donna Haraway could not admit that women do not possess a 'phallus'; she on the contrary maintains the position, more in keeping with the canons of 'strong objectivity' she would say, that women are not 'castrated', that they are 'whole, potent' (in the sense that their integrity is not compromised)<sup>22</sup> – in the same way as techno-scientific organisms are 'in a non-mystical sense nodes in webs of dynamic articulations'. Thus if science is viewed not as the description of the thing-in-itself (the fetishistic object *par excellence*)

21. 'Freud got it wrong, even while he got much of the symbolic structure right, in male-dominant conditions', *idem*, p. 145.

22. 'Women are whole, potent and "uncastrated"', *ibid.*; *puissante* (potent) is the adjective chosen by Marie NDiaye to describe the women whose lives are at the heart of her latest novel (*Trois femmes puissantes*, Paris, Gallimard, 2009).



but rather as an ensemble of situated knowledge alive to the complexity of things and their embeddedness,<sup>23</sup> the fetishistic part of so-called scientific knowledge remains as it were suspended, unsupported. Science is fetishistic but it is not for all that 'masculine'.

Such a casual manipulation of Freudian theory cannot but shock the psychoanalytic world. More generally, moreover, the way in which Donna Haraway manipulates established knowledge – in particular, the biological knowledge she has practised for part of her life – is deliberately iconoclastic, heedless of what people say, provocative. The carelessness with which she turns Freudian concepts to account is equalled only by that with which she borrows from Whitehead the concepts of 'process' and 'relationship'.<sup>24</sup> To take issue with this would be pointless; it is more interesting to evaluate the product of Donna Haraway's 'method'.

One of these results relates to my initial question: 'Is the word "feminism" still philosophically meaningful?' Indeed, if one considers feminism not as the claim for equality of rights between men and women,<sup>25</sup> as dictionaries of the French language continue to do, but as the invention of a sphere of thought outside the norms of gender, which exclude forms of sexuation and erect others as dominant forms, then the work of Donna Haraway – by inventing, as I have just tried to show, a new type of objectivity, giving to the word 'objectivity' and hence even to the word 'knowledge' a renewed significance – is feminist. Her work is also feminist in the sense that it represents, in a field (science) firmly in the grip of one of the poles of gender division, an effort (without parallel at the present time) to break with the assignment of identity and think in terms of a common world – in other words, a political world – appropriate not only to other characterizations of a (henceforth) multicultural subject but also to the effects of the most recent technological developments.

In this respect, the work of Donna Haraway is important for women philosophers – even if she herself, Donna Haraway, would certainly reject such a designation as too 'gendered' for her liking.

23. The word 'embeddedness' used by Donna Haraway (text cited from 1997) has subsequently become part of everyday language, used to describe the situation of journalists integrated in military units in Iraq – contrary to elementary rules for ensuring the objectivity of their reporting.

24. See Astrid Deuber-Manowsky, 'Diffraction et non réflexion. Sur le concept des "savoirs situés" chez Donna Haraway', personal communication at the meeting 'Comment les rationalités se renouvellent-elles aujourd'hui?' held in June 2010 in collaboration with the University of Nice/Centre de Recherche d'Histoire des Idées (University Paris-Diderot), ICI (Institute for Critical Inquiry), Berlin. See also Deuber-Mankowsky, *Praktiken der Illusion: Kant, Nietzsche, Cohen, Benjamin bis Donna J. Haraway*, Berlin, Vorwerk 8, 2007.

25. *Féminisme, n.m.* (1837, from the Latin *femina*): doctrine qui préconise l'extension des droits, du rôle de la femme dans la société (doctrine advocating the extension of the rights of women and of their role in society), *Petit Robert*, 1977.

# *Speaking as...*

## Speaking as...

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This is the first of a series of interviews made by and for the Journal. Here we interview working women, always asking them the same type of questions: 'How does being a woman impact on your profession? How do you carry out your job and what do you, as a woman, think about your working practices?' We may eventually publish a similar interview with a man, concerning working practices from the male viewpoint.



[Interview with Françoise GOROG, psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, manager at Sainte-Anne Hospital, Paris, conducted by Barbara Cassin and filmed by Charles Jusselin.](#)

# Information

### IAPh – Italia, le site Internet des femmes philosophes italiennes

IAPh – Italia ([www.iaphitalia.org](http://www.iaphitalia.org)) est le réseau italien de l'Association Internationale des femmes Philosophes. Il a été fondé suite au Colloque international IAPh « La pensée de l'expérience » organisé à Rome en 2006. Il a pour objectifs de diffuser les théories et les pratiques philosophique conduites par des femmes à travers l'Italie, de créer un réseau de femmes penseuses au niveau national et international, de partager les résultats de recherches et d'en stimuler de nouvelles, de promouvoir la discussion et la coopération, d'informer le public sur les événements, publications, expositions, films, etc. qui sont en rapport avec la pensée des femmes.

La nécessité de solliciter toute la variété de la pensée des femmes est particulièrement vive en ce moment en Italie, où l'on assiste à un retour de stéréotypes du « féminin » qui semblaient dépassés à jamais. Le risque d'un retour aux conceptions patriarcales de la femme est ressenti à des niveaux divers – en politique, dans les familles, les media, les lieux de travail, à l'école, etc.

Une attention particulière est portée à la jeunesse, en réponse à l'image de jeunes filles « décervelées » véhiculée si souvent par les medias italiens. Malgré la situation politique et culturelle actuelle en Italie, la recherche sur les théories et les pratiques féminines y est assez active, et nous voudrions y contribuer en développant tout l'intérêt que ces travaux méritent, en particulier parmi les jeunes chercheurs. Afin d'aller au-delà des préjugés liés au genre, l'IAPh Italia compte inclure dans ses débats les perspectives des hommes philosophes qui ont su reconnaître l'importance et l'originalité de l'approche philosophique des femmes, ainsi que les nouveaux domaines de recherches ouverts par elles.

On trouvera sur le site une recension d'ouvrages récemment publiés en Italie.



### Institut Émilie du Châtelet (IEC)

Né en 2006 à l'initiative du Conseil général d'Ile-de-France, l'IEC a pour objectifs la promotion des recherches sur les femmes, le sexe et le genre ; leur intégration au corpus des savoirs communs ; le développement de ces recherches dans toutes les disciplines ; la multiplication des enseignements sur ces savoirs ; la synergie entre le monde de la recherche et les acteurs sociaux, économiques, politiques, associatifs et institutionnels.

L'IEC est une fédération de recherche abritée sur le site Jardin des Plantes du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle. Elle rassemble le Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, le CNRS, l'Institut National d'Études Démographiques (INED), le Conservatoire National des Arts & Métiers (CNAM), la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques (FNSP), l'Université Paris Diderot-Paris 7, l'Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, l'Université Paris-Sud XI, l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), l'École des Hautes Études Commerciales (HEC).

Lien vers le site de l'Institut : <http://www.institutemilieduchatelet.org>



Émilie du Châtelet (detail)  
by Marianne Loir,  
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Bordeaux, France

### Réseau des Universitaires transafricains

L'Afrique transculturelle est la réalité qui se construit actuellement pour surmonter ses diverses fractures (linguistiques, scientifiques, économiques, politiques et numériques) en s'appuyant sur la diversité culturelle qui la constitue. Elle a besoin de recourir au dialogue universitaire entre cultures comme à l'une de ses composantes essentielles. Le discours universitaire est en effet l'instance par laquelle une culture prend conscience de ses propres limites et par laquelle elle parvient à discerner des rapports de complémentarité interculturelle. Il a à dévoiler les constantes anthropologiques qui sont au cœur de ces cultures et qui ne peuvent être reconnues comme telles qu'en étant également adoptées de façon conséquente et responsable par les partenaires des diverses cultures impliquées.

Les universitaires qui participent à ce réseau sont des enseignants chercheurs qui ont décidé d'assumer les responsabilités qui leur incombent dans la construction de cet espace transculturel africain.

Réseau relié aux deux chaires UNESCO du Monde Arabe (Tunis, Chaire de Philosophie de la convivialité ; titulaire : Fathi Triki) et de l'Europe (Paris, Chaire de Philosophie de la Culture et des Institutions ; titulaire : Jacques Poulain).

Responsable : Bencherki Benmeziane, Oran, Algérie. Conseil scientifique : 16 membres à parité hommes /femmes.

Ce réseau est en cours de construction et les universitaires qui désirent y participer peuvent le signaler à Irma Julienne Angue Medoux : [angueirma@yahoo.fr](mailto:angueirma@yahoo.fr) en envoyant un bref CV et un de leurs textes portant sur un des thèmes abordés dans la description ci-dessus du réseau.

**Constelaciones críticas. El pensar 'femenino' en el siglo XX, Miércoles por la noche, del 4 de mayo al 22 de junio, 2011**

Seminario presencial coordinado por: Verónica Zebadúa y Susana Delgado

¿Podemos referirnos a un pensamiento crítico propiamente 'femenino'?

¿Cómo rearticulan diversas pensadoras la herencia del pensamiento crítico?

¿Cuáles son las propuestas y contribuciones del pensamiento 'femenino' y feminista a la teoría crítica?

¿Cómo abordan la cuestión de la interpretación y la transformación de la subjetividad, la sociedad, el lenguaje y la política?

Este seminario explorará la constelación crítica del pensamiento 'femenino' y feminista del siglo XX a partir de la exposición y discusión de textos esenciales de siete filósofas y teóricas clave para entender el contexto político, filosófico y psicoanalítico del presente.

**Programa**

Simone Weil | 'La insoportable gravedad de la fuerza', por Verónica Zebadúa | 4 mayo

Hannah Arendt | 'La *vita activa* y la política de lo extraordinario', por Verónica Zebadúa | 11 mayo

Simone de Beauvoir | 'No se nace, ni se crece y tampoco se envejece mujer...', por Karine Tinat | 18 mayo

Luce Irigaray | 'La misteriosa', por Zenia Yébenes | 25 de mayo

Celia Amorós | 'Entre la igualdad y la diferencia', por Estela Serret | 1 junio

Judith Butler | 'El concepto de performatividad', por Hortensia Moreno | 8 junio

Nancy Fraser | 'Un debate nuevo sobre el concepto de justicia', por María Pía Lara | 15 junio

Conclusión | ¿Es posible hablar de una herencia crítica 'femenina'? | 22 junio

Mesa redonda con Marta Lamas y Verónica Zebadúa

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**Discriminación y violencia, Colloque du 16 au 18 juin 2011 à Mar del Plata , Argentine**

Colloque organisé par le Centro de Estudios Filosóficos y Sociales (CRFS), le Red Internacional de Filósofas de la UNESCO et le Grupo de Análisis Epistemológico (GAE) de la Facultad de Humanidades de la UNMDP.

**Áreas temáticas**

1. El título de las jornadas nunca es excluyente para la presentación, sino que es una forma de expresar nuestra preocupación por los problemas que vemos a nuestro alrededor : Política antigua y medieval
2. Libertad : economía, política, derecho
3. Tolerancia, multiculturalismo, discriminación y discusiones actuales
4. Sociedad : violencia, grupos minoritarios, diversidad
5. Problemas metodológicos de la investigación.

Contactos por e-mail: [cefysmdp@gmail.com](mailto:cefysmdp@gmail.com) / [jornadas.filopol@gmail.com](mailto:jornadas.filopol@gmail.com)  
<http://www.cefysmdp.com.ar>

**Values of the Human Person : Contemporary Challenges, les 3 et 4 juin 2011 à Bucarest, Roumanie**

Colloque organisé la Faculté de Philosophie de l'Université de Bucarest.

The aim of this conference is to focus attention on the values of the human person considered under the impact of the contemporary process of globalization. Continuous qualitative increase and diversification of knowledge cause more and more fragmentation in the human understanding of oneself and one's environment. This threatens human civilization in new ways. New challenges are addressed to the humanities, knowledge and culture.

The discussion of these issues will serve as a propedeutic to the 23rd World Congress of Philosophy in Athens, 2013, whose theme is "Philosophy as Inquiry and Way of Life".

The selection of the Conference papers (up to 3500 signs in English) should be sent to Professor Romulus Brancoveanu :  
[brancoveanu@ub-filosofie.ro](mailto:brancoveanu@ub-filosofie.ro), or [rbrancoveanu@yahoo.com](mailto:rbrancoveanu@yahoo.com)  
<http://www.ub-filosofie.ro>

### **Demande de collaboration**

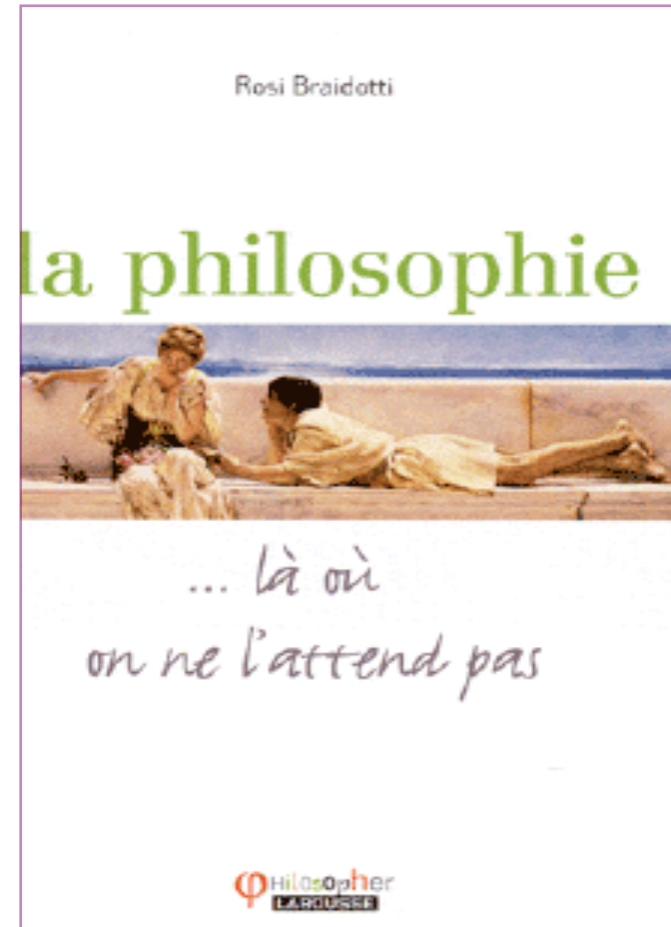
Dans le cadre de sa thèse intitulée « Du totalitarisme au probabilisme : la critique aronienne du positivisme et du marxisme », Laurentine Awono (Cameroun) recherche une codirection, afin de travailler avec un spécialiste de Raymond Aron et de s'ouvrir à d'autres points de vue et méthodes. Contacter Laurentine Awono, [lili\\_laure@yahoo.fr](mailto:lili_laure@yahoo.fr)

# Events

**BRAIDOTTI Rosi, *La philosophie... là où on ne l'attend pas*, Paris, Éditions Larousse, Collection Philosoper, 2009**

**Table des matières**

1. La philo hors d'elle-même
  2. « Je pense donc elle est » : La philosophie au féminin
    - Le journal d'une séductrice
    - Le féminin et le féminisme
    - Cours introductif à la philo féministe : une cartographie méta-méthodologique
    - La génération du post-structuralisme
    - Vers un nouveau matérialisme
  3. Autrement qu'autre : la philosophie après l'eurocentrisme
    - Vers un nomadisme généralisé ?
    - Critiques philosophiques de l'eurocentrisme
    - La pensée postcoloniale
    - Contre le nationalisme méthodologique
    - Des Européens transnationaux
    - Les nouveaux cosmopolites
  4. Vers une philosophie post-humaine
    - Aimez-vous Dolly ?
    - Le dépassement de l'anthropocentrisme
    - Le devenir animal
    - Gilles Deleuze et le devenir animal
    - Le post-humain planétaire ou devenir-monde
    - Par amour de Zoé
  5. La mort, la terre, le sort
    - La politique de la « vie-même »
    - Une éthique affirmative de durabilité
    - Le sort comme événement qui s'est déjà produit
    - Devenir imperceptible, encore
- Épilogue



Née en Australie, docteur en philosophie de l'université de Paris 1 (et membre actif du comité de rédaction des *Cahiers du Grif* dans les années 80), Rosi Braidotti a été professeur de philosophie et responsable des « études de genre » à l'Université de Nimègue (Pays-Bas) et au Birbeck College de Londres, tout en se faisant connaître internationalement par ses conférences comme par ses écrits.

Ce livre est le premier qu'elle publie en français, les précédents ayant paru en anglais. On y retrouve l'inspiration deleuzienne qui animait initialement sa pensée – son attachement à la notion de « sujet nomade » –, mais déplacée, complexifiée et reformulée dans de nouveaux contextes.

La dimension du négatif ou du tragique est étrangère au développement de cette pensée vitaliste : le sujet nomade s'y articule en effet au concept de vie, comme *zoé* (élan vital), l'éthique impliquant la transformation permanente du négatif en positif dans « l'absence de sens de la douleur ». Vie non anthropocentrique, en continuité avec la vie animale, car « je ne fais que passer » ; vie qui me traverse mais que je ne possède pas.

« Cette vision affirmative de la vie et de la pensée situe le nomadisme philosophique dans une logique de positivité et non dans l'économie rédemptrice de la pensée métaphysique classique » écrit Rosi Braidotti. Elle va ainsi à l'encontre de la méditation post-chrétienne de Heidegger, scandant « l'être pour la mort » : « ce n'est pas parce que *thanatos* finit toujours par gagner qu'elle doit bénéficier d'un statut conceptuel aussi élevé. La mort est surévaluée ». Car la vie excède la limite de l'individu, voire même de l'humain.

Dans cette perspective il n'est pas étonnant qu'un chapitre soit consacré au « devenir animal », devenir qui tend à éroder la limite entre animalité et humanité au nom, toujours, du concept de vie, *zoé*

« qui fait éclater les limites des nationalismes et même de l'anthropocentrisme ».

Il y a des formes différentes de déclinaison de la vie et on ne peut oublier « tous ceux pour qui la subjectivité n'est pas un droit reconnu ». De sorte que l'auteur, dans le prolongement du « sujet nomade », se définit finalement comme « une activiste post-humaine ».

Rosi Braidotti convoque dans son périple non seulement Deleuze et Guattari qui furent ses premiers maîtres, mais aussi Balibar, Hardt ou Negri, voire Derrida, dans la mesure où, selon des modalités diverses, ils ont des pratiques de déplacement ou de transgression des limites identitaires et font place à la pensée et à la pratique des migrations – qui semblent ici faire écho politiquement à l'ontologie du « sujet nomade ». La relation ainsi valorisée tient davantage à l'effacement des limites qu'à l'élaboration d'un dialogue à travers les limites tel que le propose par exemple une Hannah Arendt, laquelle distingue d'ailleurs nettement la vie comme *bios* de la vie comme *zoé*.

On ne peut que s'émerveiller – tout en s'étonnant – de ce prodigieux vitalisme qui réussit à tenir la mort, et la mort de l'autre, pour un simple épisode. On a en tout cas affaire à une pensée totalement étrangère au tragique – tragique chrétien, mais aussi tragique grec – dont on trouverait la quintessence dans la notion heideggérienne de « l'être pour la mort » : car « dans un tel cadre la mort est tout au plus un point » écrit Rosi Braidotti, révélant ainsi l'ambiguïté de la position vitaliste qui, en soulignant « l'impersonnalité de la vie », aux confins de l'humanité et de l'animalité, permet et vise le meilleur mais frôle aussi ce qui fut le pire du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

A la lecture de ce livre, on est en tout cas renvoyé à une nouvelle réflexion sur l'ambiguïté – philosophique et politique – du concept de vie, entre *zoé* et *bios*.

**BERTI Gabriela, *Pioneers of Graffiti in Spain*, Universidad Politécnic de Valencia, 2009**

This book is the first published in the world that incorporates rigorous information about the history of the birth of Spanish graffiti in the 80's. The book is divided into two parts, focussing on the early development of the phenomenon. The first part is an essay, with clear philosophical references about the place of graffiti in the art world in general and in public space in particular. The second part falls squarely in the early germ of Spanish graffiti. The influences from the rest of the European continent and the United States, the emergence of graffiti in major art institutions, its reception in the media, open up this part of the book. From there, the analysis is directed towards the evolution of urban art from the 80's to different cities in Spain trying to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of history and politics.



© Gabriela Berti

After 40 years of darkness and dictatorship, the participation of young people in the urban space was limited to political graffiti. From the 80's on, we can observe changes in attitudes and collective practices which are reflected throughout the country in the occupation of public space and a growing number of urban artists, with a strong aesthetic focus. The book also analyses the figure of women into this scenario. In the mentioned context, young women began to show up very timidly. The book brings into focus the different ways in which women's organization created its own distinctive space within the local urban art scene.

Gabriela Berti has interviewed more than 60 «writers», to give first-person voice to the pioneers of this urban art in Spain. The author conducted an investigation for a year, financing by herself the documentation project. Thanks to the Polytechnic University of Valencia, she edited the book. The book was launched in FNAC, into the urban art Hypnotic Festival (Barcelona). It is written in three languages : Spanish, Catalan and English.

**DESPRET Vinciane, STENGERS Isabelle, *Les Faiseuses d'histoires. Que font les femmes à la pensée ? Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond / La Découverte, 2011***

Les femmes ne sont jamais contentes. A témoin, Virginia Woolf qui appela les femmes à se méfier de l'offre généreuse qui leur était faite : pouvoir, comme les hommes, faire carrière à l'université. Il ne faut pas, écrivit-elle, rejoindre cette « procession d'hommes chargés d'honneurs et de responsabilités » ; méfiez-vous de ces institutions où règnent le conformisme et la violence. Vinciane Despret et Isabelle Stengers se sont posé la question : qu'avons-nous appris, nous les filles infidèles de Virginia qui avons, de fait, rejoint les rangs des « hommes cultivés » ? Et comment prolonger aujourd'hui le cri de Woolf, « Penser nous devons », dans une université désormais en crise ?

Ces questions, elles les ont relayées auprès d'autres femmes. Leurs témoignages ont ouvert des dimensions inattendues. Elles ont raconté des anecdotes qui les ont rendues capables non seulement de dire non et de résister, mais de continuer à penser et à créer dans la joie et dans l'humour. Et surtout, ces femmes, comme toujours, ont fait des histoires...

**Table des matières**

**1.** Nous qui sommes à l'université. **2.** Pas entre notre nom. **3.** Créer en nous. **4.** En tant que femmes ? **5.** Prise de relais ? **6.** Le personnel est politique. **7.** La question de l'héritage. **8.** Deux plus une. **9.** Construire la question. **10.** Une induction, cela marche ? **11.** Laurence, se faire une place ? **12.** Françoise, un gai savoir au féminin ? **13.** Laurence, le courage de résister. **14.** Bernadette, s'autoriser à penser. **15.** Mona, ne pas nier . **16.** Barbara, la colère et le rire. **17.** Benedikte, ne pas oublier. **18.** Émilie, ce n'est la place de personne. **19.** Benedikte, elles voudraient plus. **20.** Marcelle, rien n'interdit. Épilogue.



**FAGOT-LARGEAULT Anne, *Médecine et philosophie*, Paris, PUF, Collection Éthique et philosophie morale Médecine, 2010.**



L'engagement médical implique toute une philosophie. Une métaphysique, parce que la médecine trouve sa raison d'être dans le constat de la réalité des maux qui affligent les vivants. Une épistémologie, parce qu'une connaissance du normal et du pathologique est la nécessaire condition d'une lutte intelligente contre ces maux. Des dilemmes moraux, parce que cette lutte associe la recherche du bien des malades individuels, le respect de leur autonomie, et la prise en compte de l'intérêt collectif.

C'est cette philosophie de l'acte médical que les essais ici réunis entreprennent d'explicitier, en abordant notamment les défis méthodologiques et éthiques de cet art, tout armé de technologies et au carrefour de multiples sciences, qu'est la médecine.

L'auteur, philosophe et médecin, expose avec rigueur et clarté les stratégies utilisées par la recherche médicale pour détecter, identifier et classer les éléments pathogènes (étiologie des affections, logique de l'inférence diagnostique, recherche épidémiologique), les procédures employées pour évaluer les coûts et bénéfices des interventions thérapeutiques (notion de qualité de vie), et les problèmes moraux soulevés par la mise à disposition de services de santé (procréation médicalement assistée, suivi de grossesse).

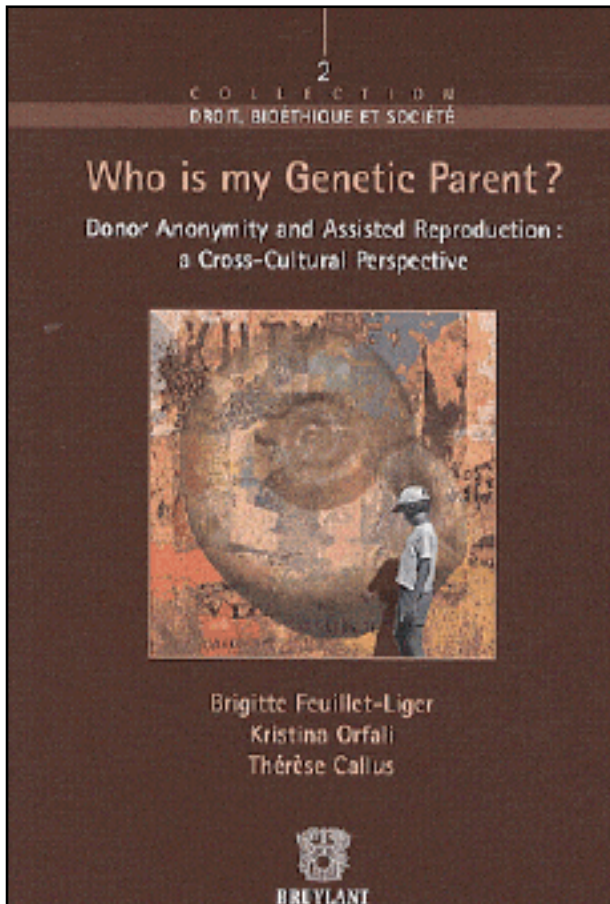
De cette lecture, on sort convaincu que la sagesse médicale tient à un fragile équilibre entre dévouement à ceux qui souffrent, rationalité incluant l'acceptation du risque, et lucidité sur les limites de nos connaissances.

#### **Table des matières**

Introduction. **1.** La philosophie de l'hygiène en 1878. **2.** Calcul des chances et diagnostic médical. **3.** Variation sur les notions de causalité et d'imputabilité. **4.** Approche médicale de la causalité dans les systèmes complexes. **5.** Les droits de l'embryon (fœtus) et la notion de personne humaine potentielle. **6.** Le concept de maladie sous-jacent aux tentatives d'informatisation du diagnostic médical. **7.** La réflexion philosophique en bioéthique. **8.** Enquête sur la notion de qualité de la vie. **9.** Procréation responsable. **10.** Sur la compassion.



**FEUILLET-LIGER Brigitte, ORFALI Kristina, CALLUS Thérèse, *Who is my Genetic Parent ? Donor Anonymity and Assisted Reproduction : a Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Bruxelles, Bruylant, 2010.**



If over the last couple of decades, advances in reproductive medicine have helped many couples who are unable to conceive naturally, the initial aim was generally to favour conception using the couple's own gametes. However, the successive developments of artificial insemination and in vitro fertilisation (IVF) have provided us with alternative ways to conceive which no longer rely upon biological parentage. Today, a couple can conceive a child with gametes from a third party and can even adopt an embryo conceived by another couple. In such cases, it is necessary to reconcile the interests of all concerned (the infertile couple, the gamete or embryo donors and the child). Certain countries have adopted laws which impose donor anonymity which deny the child of any information on the donor, in the belief that this best assures the child's welfare. However, such a social choice is questioned by the increasing demand by children born through artificial insemination by donor, to remove anonymity. Such claims have been supported in certain countries who have adopted a principle of genetic transparency.

This book is the fruit of rich debate and reflection between lawyers, doctors, psychoanalysts and sociologists during the first Workshop of the International Academic Network on Bioethics (IANB). Through a comparative approach, the chapters examine how the question of anonymity in sixteen different countries is dealt with – anonymity which may be absolute, relative or even non-existent. Despite diversity between legal systems, one thing is sure : the question of abolishing anonymity is one of immediate importance. The answer either unites or divides. But could it be any other way on a subject which goes to the heart of our social perceptions on individual identity, parentage and parenthood ?

**FEUILLET-LIGER Brigitte, ORFALI Kristina, CALLUS Thérèse, *Who is my Genetic Parent ? Donor Anonymity and Assisted Rreproduction: a Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Bruxelles, Bruylant, 2010 (suite).**

### **Table of contents**

Preface, René Frydman. **1.** Medically assisted reproduction with a third party donor: rethinking anonymity in France. An insider's view, Jean-Marie Kunstmann. **2.** Assisted reproduction in France: from absolute anonymity to possible traceability, Brigitte Feuillet-Liger. **3.** Donor anonymity in assisted reproduction techniques: a psychoanalytical view. Anonymity denies the psychological truth of donation, Geneviève Delaisi de Parseval. **4.** Questioning anonymity, Dominique Mehl. **5.** From secret origins to anonymous procreators, Claude Sureau. **6.** The identification of gamete donors in the Federal Republic of Germany: a controversial issue with disturbing consequences, Françoise Furkel. **7.** Anonymity and assisted reproduction techniques in Belgian law: Legislation for existing practice in the law of 6th July 2007, Geneviève Schamps and Marie-Noelle Derese. **8.** Assisted reproduction techniques and anonymity: Brazilian law and new forms of parenthood, Maria Claudia Crespo Brauner. **9.** Anonymity and assisted reproduction techniques in Spain: a controversial legal principle, Verónica San Julian. **10.** From total to partial anonymity: the (r)evolution of English law on assisted reproduction techniques, Thérèse Callus. **11.** Assisted reproduction techniques and anonymity under Greek law, Penelope Agallopoulou. **12.** Anonymity in assisted reproduction: gender equality and a pro-natal reproductive policy in Hungarian law, Judit Sandor. **13.** Anonymity and assisted reproduction in Italy: a marginal issue, Stéphane Bauzon. **14.** Anonymity and assisted reproduction in Japan: dialectic of anonymity and the well-being of the child, Ryuichi Ida. **15.** Gamete donor anonymity under Dutch law, J.G. Sijmons. **16.** "Donor anonymity" in Portugal, Guilherme De Oliveira and Rafael Reis. **17.** Assisted reproduction and removal of anonymity in Sweden: between a tradition of transparency and a novel status of the child, Kristina Orfali. **18.** Assisted reproduction under Swiss law: the truth about the conception and the identity of the gamete donor, Dominique Manai. **19.** Tunisian legislation on assisted reproduction technologies rooted in religion: the prohibition on donation, Amel Aouij-Mrad. **20.** Assisted reproduction and anonymous donation in the US: a market-driven approach, Kristina Orfali. **21.** Assisted reproduction and anonymity: looking beyond the differences, Brigitte Feuillet-Liger.

**FLAX, Jane P. *Resonances of Slavery in Race. Gender relations: Shadow at the Heart of American Politics*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.**

In this book, I argue that Americans have never properly mourned the long term effects of slavery on American politics. Instead, we remain in a melancholic state in relation to our past and its resonances in the present. This unmourned past/present shapes practices of subjectivity, citizenship and law, and the distribution of socially valued goods such as power, material goods and social respect. To support this claim, I examine data about social distribution and develop a concept of race / gender that enables us to track genealogies of various race /gender positions. I also develop the concept of the « political unconscious », a powerful set of socially constructed and shared fantasies, associations, emotions and unconscious beliefs, and explore its effects on sustaining both race / gender melancholia and toxic race /gender relations. Through the analysis of three films (Monster's Ball, The Deep End, Crash), I track some of the modes and operations of the political unconscious. To test the limits of liberal discourse in addressing these issues, I deconstruct the work of John Rawls. Finally using Michel Fourcault's ideas regarding « care of the self », I suggest alternate practices that would support proper mourning and also propose some practical public policies that would open up space for the ongoing work of addressing the effects of the past in the present and altering race / gender relations.



Jane FLAX

**FRAISSE Geneviève, *A côté du genre. Sexe et philosophie de l'égalité*, Lormont, Le Bord de l'eau, Collection Diagnostics, 2010.**



*Eros* et libido, sexe et genre : les mots se succèdent depuis un peu plus d'un siècle pour dire la dualité et le rapport entre hommes et femmes. Si l'on cherche l'objet philosophique, on trouve l'expression « différence des sexes », « *Geschlechterdifferenz* » sous la plume hégélienne. Quant au genre, ce mot fait le pari de brouiller les pistes des représentations contraintes qui assignent chaque sexe à sa place. Et si, toute terminologie confondue, on s'en tenait à ce que la « différence des sexes » est une catégorie vide ? Alors, on se situerait « à côté du genre », à côté des affaires de définition et d'identité, pour établir le repérage des lieux où sont pensés les sexes, dans leur tension, leur décalage, leur disparité au regard du contemporain démocratique. Au fond, la démarche est inversée : il ne s'agit pas de voir ce qu'il en est du sexe et du genre, mais de dire ce qui surgit dans la pensée quand égalité et liberté révèlent des enjeux sexués dans la politique et la création, l'économie et le corps, la pensée et l'agir.

**FRAISSE Geneviève, *Les femmes et leur histoire*, Nouvelle édition revue, Paris, Gallimard, Folio Histoire, 2010.**

Les femmes et leur histoire, car écrire l'histoire des femmes ne peut se limiter au seul usage des règles et méthodes de la discipline historique. L'histoire des femmes dépasse l'opposition commune entre le réel et sa représentation, et la quête de la place du sujet dans cette opposition : elle renvoie, en effet, fondamentalement à la différence des sexes, à la manière dont les philosophes ont pensé cette différence, aux modalités grâce auxquelles législateurs et acteurs de l'histoire ont bâti avec cette différence l'ordre politique.

Écrire l'histoire des femmes oblige donc à lier ensemble, dans la construction de l'objet historique, les systèmes de la philosophie – de Rousseau à Derrida – et des données empiriques de l'histoire – des initiatives révolutionnaires à l'inscription de la parité dans la Constitution. Des figures singulières du combat féministe – telles Mme de Staël, George Sand, Louise Michel, Clémence Royer ou Madeleine Vernet – côtoient donc dans cet ouvrage l'analyse serrée des grands discours ou textes fondateurs de l'exclusion comme de l'inclusion des femmes. Parce que, nous montre Geneviève Fraisse, la question des femmes fut de réintroduire dans l'histoire, c'est-à-dire de prendre part à l'énigme du devenir plutôt que de continuer à être représentées comme des énigmes de la nature.

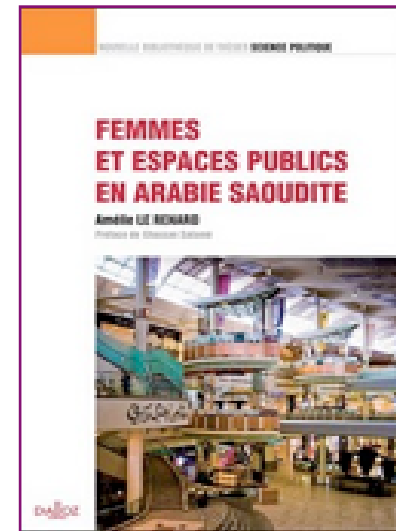


**LE RENARD Amélie, *Femmes et espaces publics en Arabie Saoudite*, Paris, Dalloz, 2011.**

Cette publication est tirée de la thèse d'Amélie Le Renard, consacrée à l'accès aux espaces publics de jeunes Saoudiennes à Riyad.

**Table des matières**

Introduction. **Première partie** : De la ségrégation de genre à la « réforme » - **1.** Ségrégation de genre et distinction nationale. **2** « Réforme » et nouveaux espaces accessibles aux Saoudiennes ; **Deuxième partie** : Négocier la ville en tant que jeune Saoudienne - **3.** Insécurité, précautions et distinction. **4.** Négocier une mobilité et en payer le coût. **5.** L'activité professionnelle comme style de vie, la réalisation de soi comme objectif ; **Troisième partie** : la société des jeunes citadines : interactions et identifications au sein des espaces partagés - **6.** Le développement de l'homosociabilité. **7.** Transgresser ensemble ; Chapitre 8 Style contre style : homosociabilité et négociations des féminités.



**PATEMAN Carole, *Le contrat sexuel*, traduction de *Sexual Contract* (1988) par Charlotte Nordmann, préface de Geneviève Fraisse, postface d'Éric Fassin ; La Découverte, Collection Textes à l'appui, série Bibliothèque de l'IEC (Institut Émilie du Châtelet), 2010.**



Par quel étrange paradoxe le contrat social, censé instituer la liberté et l'égalité civiles, a-t-il maintenu les femmes dans un état de subordination ? Pourquoi, dans le nouvel ordre social, celles-ci n'ont-elles pas accédé, en même temps que les hommes, à la condition d' « individus » émancipés ?

Les théories du contrat social, hérités de Locke et de Rousseau, et renouvelées depuis Rawls, ne ignorent les enjeux de justice que soulève le genre. Carole Pateman montre, dans cet ouvrage de référence enfin traduit en français, que le passage de l'ordre ancien du statut à une société moderne du contrat ne marque en rien la fin du patriarcat. La philosophe met ainsi au jour l'envers refoulé du contrat social : le « contrat sexuel » qui, via le partage entre sphère privée et sphère publique, fonde la domination des femmes.

#### **Table des matières**

Avant-propos. **1.** Contracter. **2.** Confusions patriarcales. **3.** Le contrat, l'individu et l'esclavage. **4.** La genèse, les pères et la liberté politique des fils. **5.** Épouses, esclaves et esclaves salariés. **6.** Le féminisme et le contrat de mariage. **7.** Qu'est-ce qui ne va pas dans la prostitution ? **8.** La fin de l'histoire ?

**ROUCH Hélène, *Les corps, ces objets encombrants. Contribution à la critique féministe des sciences*, Paris, éditions iXe, 2011.**

Dans les éprouvettes des biologistes de la reproduction, les cellules sexuelles mâles et femelles sont strictement équivalentes : 1 ovocyte = 1 spermatozoïde, chacun amenant la moitié des gènes du futur embryon. Fruit d'une démarche scientifique qui réduit la complexité à une série de mécanismes simples, cette égalité séduisante fait cependant abstraction du corps et vient paradoxalement renforcer la différence des sexes. En amont de la fécondation in vitro, les organismes féminins sont en effet soumis à des traitements lourds pour fonctionner sur le modèle masculin et produire en abondance des gamètes aisément manipulables.

Les articles réunis dans ce recueil permettent de suivre à la fois l'évolution des techniques et les interrogations qu'elles suscitent.

Qu'il s'agisse de l'économie de la gestation ou de celle de la reproduction, des dérives eugénistes et des prodigieux avantages à attendre des progrès de la science, des égarements moralistes de la bioéthique ou encore, surtout, de l'identité sexuée et de la définition des catégories de sexe, la question du corps est ici au centre du propos. Hélène Rouch l'examine avec insistance dans une perspective clairement située, qui l'a également conduite à jouer un rôle actif dans le développement des études et recherches féministes. *Les corps, ces objets encombrants* rend justice à cet engagement. Composé de textes écrits sur une période de trente ans, il vise aussi à restituer, pour partie, le parcours intellectuel et politique d'une scientifique à la critique exigeante.



Enseignante en biologie, Hélène Rouch fut une des fondatrices du séminaire Limites-Frontières (1980-1988). Elle a contribué à la création de l'Association nationale des études féministes et était rattachée au CEDREF (Paris 7). Elle faisait également partie du collectif Editorial de la « Bibliothèque du féminisme ».

**Table des matières**

Ouverture : Les navires sont pleins de fantômes - Membranes, limites et frontières : Limites et membranes : Le paradoxe d'une obsession. Le placenta comme tiers. La maternité mise à nu par ses propriétaires. La maîtrise de la reproduction : les enjeux de la catégorisation des sexes. Nouvelles techniques de reproduction : de la différence à l'inégalité. Les nouvelles techniques de reproduction : vers l'indifférenciation sexuelle La dualité dans la reproduction sexuée. La médecine face à l'identité féminine - Lectures critiques : Les données de la biologie. La différence des sexes chez Adrienne Sahuqué et Simone de Beauvoir : leur lecture des discours biologiques et médicaux. Acquis scientifiques et avancées féministes : Simone de Beauvoir, Suzanne Lilar, Adrienne Sahuqué. Présentation de Sciences et genre. L'activité scientifique des femmes - Recherches féministes, pratiques politiques : Une agora des femmes. Recherches sur les femmes et recherches féministes : l'action thématique programmée du CNRS. Huairou, le premier jour.

### **Bibliothèque de l'IEC**

L'Institut Émilie du Châtelet (IEC) a lancé un programme de traductions en français de travaux scientifiques de renommée internationale sur les femmes, le sexe et le genre, en particulier avec les éditions La Découverte. Dans ce cadre, le premier ouvrage publié est celui de la philosophe américaine Carlota Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (1988). Paraîtront ensuite *Sexing the Body* de la biologiste Anne Fausto-Sterling, puis *Throwing Like a Girl* d'Iris Marion Young.

### **Collection Femmes africaines, dirigée par Irma Angue Medoux, Ariane Michel Djossou et Aïssata Soumana Kindo. Éditions L'Harmattan.**

Irma Angue Medoux : [angueirma@yahoo.fr](mailto:angueirma@yahoo.fr)

Pendant longtemps, la femme africaine a été cantonnée dans ses rôles d'épouse, de mère, de sœur et de gardienne de la cellule familiale. Ces fonctions, pourtant essentielles, ont abouti à sa servitude sociale, intellectuelle et politique. Malgré un processus d'émergence et d'émancipation amorcé depuis les années 1980, la femme africaine se trouve toujours exclue des milieux où s'élabore la pensée et se décide le devenir du monde.

La présente collection cherche à combler ce retard en rassemblant les travaux des intellectuelles africaines de tous bords. Recherchant l'émergence d'une « voix intellectuelle » spécifiquement féminine, elle privilégiera les analyses originales en sciences humaines (la philosophie, la sociologie, la psychologie, le droit, l'économie, l'art et la littérature) aussi bien que les témoignages de vie les plus significatifs offerts par les femmes africaines elles-mêmes afin d'offrir à la femme africaine une place dans le dialogue interculturel international.

Cette collection n'entend pas présenter un manifeste féministe de plus, mais veut témoigner de la façon dont les Africaines, par leurs réflexions, leurs témoignages et leurs productions critiques, participent à l'épanouissement intellectuel du continent africain et à l'enrichissement de la culture mondiale. Elle est donc ouverte à tous les intellectuels, femmes et hommes, qui sont préoccupés par leur sort.





### Les Éditions iXe

Une nouvelle maison d'édition, rassemblant cinq collections : « racine de ixe » pour des textes radicalement féministes ; « xx-y-z » sur les glissements du genre, leurs effets de brouillage ou de surdétermination des catégories de sexe ; « ixe prime » pour la fiction et pour l'imaginaire ; « fonctions dérivées » pour les récits de vie et les bouts de parcours, biographiques ou autobiographiques ; « la petite ixe » pour des curiosités de toute nature, lettres, discours, tracts ou chansons. Titres parus : Monique Wittig, Le chantier littéraire (novembre 2010) ; Christine Aubrée, Danielle Charrest, L'enchilada (mars 2011), Hélène Rouch, Les corps, ces objets encombrants (mars 2011).

La lettre sous laquelle elle s'affiche exprime l'anonymat, le classé secret ou classé obscène, l'indifférenciation et la multiplication, le sexe, la sexualité, la potentialité de la sexuaction. iXe endosse cette polysémie troublante en se plaçant par jeu sous le signe neutre de l'algèbre: [iXe = l'inconnue de l'équation]. Elle s'attribue la marque du genre pour la poser en question.

iXe s'inscrit dans le paysage d'un féminisme contemporain traversé de lignes de force et de lignes de faille qui dessinent ses perspectives et orientent ses points de vue. Elle s'est formée au cours d'une expérience longue d'une vingtaine d'années, entamée aux Éditions « Côté-femmes » avec la publication de grands textes du féminisme matérialiste (Nicole-Claude Mathieu : L'anatomie politique ; Colette Guillaumin : Sexe, race et pratique du pouvoir), poursuivie ensuite à « La Bibliothèque du féminisme » (L'Harmattan).

iXe se crée pour aider à consolider les lignes de force du paysage où elle habite et à en baliser les lignes de faille, signaler les intersections des formes multiples de l'oppression, tracer des tangentes dont les lignes de fuite dégageraient l'horizon des utopies.



**Agone, « Comment le genre trouble la classe », n° 43, 2010.**

Éditions Agone, BP 70072, F-13192 Marseille cedex 20. [www.agone.org](http://www.agone.org)

**Sommaire**

Ce que le tournant postmoderne a fait au féminisme, La rédaction - Le marxisme et l'origine de l'oppression des femmes : une nécessaire réactualisation, Christophe Darmangeat – « Une force féminine consciente et responsable qui agisse en tant qu'avant-garde de progrès ». Le mouvement Mujeres Libres (1936-1939), Miguel Chueca – Une femme de mineur à la tribune de l'Année internationale de la femme (1976), Domitila Barrios de Chungara – Pourquoi le postculturalisme est une impasse pour le féminisme, Barbara Epstein – Féminisme et postmodernisme, Sabina Lovibond – Peut-on penser une construction performative du genre ?, Bruno Ambroise – Cent ans de sollicitude en France. Domesticité, reproduction sociale, migration et histoire coloniale, Nasima Moujoud et Jules Falquet.



### **Multitudes, revue politique, artistique, philosophique**

La rubrique « Majeure » du n° 42 de la revue est intitulée « Gouines rouges, viragos vertes ». Sommaire de la rubrique : Gouines rouges, viragos vertes, Anne Querrien. Tumultueuses, furieuses, tordues, trans, teuff... féministes aujourd'hui. Cinq militant.e.s dans la bataille (entretien réalisé par Pascale Molinier). Ce que fait l'histoire aux femmes, Cathy Bernheim. Riot grrrls américaines et réseaux féministes « Underground » français, Manon Labry. Entre refus de l'assignation et norme de genre : regards anthropologiques, (entretien réalisé par Pascale Absi). Pauline, panthère rose avec groupe (entretien réalisé par Juliette Grimont). Red light district et porno durable, Marie-Hélène Bourcier. La femme est-elle un homme économique comme les autres ? Manon Garcia. Entre lucioles et vers luisants, Anne Sauvagnargues. L'éthique du *care* en trois subversions, Sandra Laugier. Jardinières en commun, Doina Petrescu.



### **Revista Interdisciplinaria de Bioética (RIB)**

Publication semestrielle du Centro de Estudios en Filosofía y Ciencias Humanas (CEF y CH) de la Fondation Atenea et du Centro des Investigaciones Filosóficas de la Facultad de philosophie et Lettre de la BUAP (Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexique). Parution du prochain numéro : juin 2011. Directrice de publication : Celita Godina selidagod@jotmail.com. Site de la revue : <http://revistaibioetica.zobyhost.com/>

Cette revue se propose de traiter de la bioéthique dans une perspective philosophique. Elle se veut un outil pédagogique dans le domaine de la philosophie de la bioéthique, raison pour laquelle chaque numéro comporte un dossier sur un thème particulier, destiné aux étudiants et chercheurs.



### La postmodernité en Afrique et en Europe, Oran (Algérie), 28-30 novembre 2010

Colloque organisé par Benmeziane Bencherki et Irma Julienne Angue Medoux.

L'objectif de cette rencontre était d'analyser les diverses façons dont la philosophie disciplinaire, tout comme la philosophie quotidienne de chacun, procèdent à la critique éclairée de nos sociétés postmodernes, sans tomber pour autant dans le sentiment d'impuissance. Comment les « philosophies » africaines ajustent-elles les connaissances contemporaines que leur apportent sciences, épistémologies et logiques à la connaissance du monde dans lequel nous vivons et réfléchissons notre vie ? Comment ajustent-elles leur proximité « moderne » avec les droits de l'homme à la pratique judiciaire des juges qui officient dans les États-nations ? Comment participent-elles à l'instauration de démocraties fondées sur des consensus contingents, mais néanmoins prudents ? Comment prennent-elles part aux verdicts portés par l'opinion publique internationale sur l'hécatombe produite par les excès mortels du capitalisme dans les pays pauvres, comme dans les pays riches ? Parviennent-elles à remobiliser l'histoire de la pensée philosophique pour en faire un outil critique inspirateur d'une « sagesse » minimale ? Quelles sont les actions entreprises dans ces deux contextes pour traiter le problème des rapports des hommes et des femmes dans le respect mutuel de la faculté de juger, sachant qu'ils participent, les uns et les autres, à un usage commun du langage et de la réflexion philosophique ?

#### Schéma du programme

1. L'Afrique dans la postmodernité : postmodernité africaine et postmodernité européenne.
2. Pragmatisme et économie en Afrique postmoderne.
3. Art, culture et dialogue interculturel.
4. Éthique et responsabilité politique en Afrique postmoderne. Les tâches de la philosophie dans l'Afrique postmoderne.

## **Women's History and Modern Gender Roles : Rethinking the Past, Thinking about the Future**

Materials of the Third International Conference of the Russian Association for Research in Women's History (RARWH), 1-3 November 2010, Cherepovets, Russia. The Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 2010. Vols. 1-2 (ISBN 978-5-4211-0024-9 and 978-5-4211-0025-6). The two volumes (Introduction and 13 parts) include the papers at the conference in Cherepovets as well as those whose authors could not participate in the conference.

### **Content**

Introduction : Prof. Natalya Pushkareva : "Two Trends, Two Discourses in Modern Women and Gender Studies in History", discusses the two discourses in Russian Women's gender Studies and makes a conclusion to the importance of tolerance to the opinion of the other. **1** : Woman in Preindustrial Europe and Russia : Models of Reception and Behavior : 12 articles on aristocratic women in Europe and Russia -- **2** : Woman of the Preindustrial Europe and Russia in the Space of Family and Marriage : 12 articles on the philosophical aspects of marriage, as well as on sexual violence, adultery, divorce and religious aspects of marriage -- **3** : Woman and Religion : 8 articles on female saints and woman 's roles in religious communities -- **4** : Transformation of Family and Marriage Relationships in Modern Times : 24 articles on variants of family structure in Russia and abroad -- **5** : Retrospection of Solving 'Woman's Question' in Modern Times : 18 articles on the problems of female roles in different societies, status of women and gender equality -- **6** : Ways of Representation of Female Images : 14 articles on constructing female images in literature and press -- **7** : The History of Women's Movements and Feminisms : 13 articles on feminist and suffragist movements -- **8** : The History of Women's Education : 13 articles, discusses various examples of female educational institutions --

## Events - Conference notes

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**9** : Women and Power. History and Modernity : 17 : articles on women's role in politics of the past and present -- **10** : Male, Female and Children's Everyday Life : 13 articles on women's life throughout the centuries -- **11** : Modern Gender Order : Formation, Evolution and Mechanisms of (Re)Production : 15 articles on the applications of gender to different aspects of life, from holidays to children's behavior, migration, education and employment -- **12** : Peculiarities of Constructing Female Identity : 10 articles on women's role in literature and theatre, as well as on theoretical approaches to femininity, etc. -- **13** : Discursive Practices of Constructing Gender : 11 articles, concentrates mainly on cultural and linguistic applications to gender.

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### Martin Rueff interviews Sylvia Cavalieri

**Martin RUEFF: Let's begin at the beginning: what is *Donne Pensanti*? How did your project come about? How did you get together to give rise to this project?**

**Silvia CAVALIERI:** *Donne Pensanti* is an association that sets out to promote a social and cultural project. It arose from a desire to make the voice of women heard in a political context that tends to reduce them to silence and to offend their dignity by means of simplistic and repetitive images of their bodies, of their status and of their existence.

More specifically, the association was born in 2009 when Francesca Sanzo, a well-known blogger on the Italian circuit, decided to launch an appeal against the reduction of women to the status of goods and, more generally, against all gender stereotypes from a blog set up for the purpose and to which she gave that very name: *Donne Pensanti* (thinking women). An expert in Web communication techniques and a passionate narrator, Francesca is a pragmatic humanist in that she always tries to reflect in practical terms her wide-ranging and articulated vision of social and cultural problems. Hence she understood straight away that the movement she had in mind should not be confined to ethereal debates among peers; what was needed was to put some pressure on public opinion and on the institutions themselves. As there was a considerable risk that the movement would become lost in a thousand and one ever more abstract proposals, there had to be an immediate focus on a limited number of specific goals. Francesca at that point decided to enrol her companion Stefano Castelli, who has a literary background but in addition is a computer expert, and she proposed that I join in the adventure. As it happens, we have known each other since secondary school and I was concerned with gender issues at university in the studies I devoted to Portuguese and Mozambican literature.

Thus it was that we joined up again to put on paper a sort of manifesto containing our goals and our proposals and we launched our first project, *Testimonia il femminile* (Witness in the feminine). The point was to gather online stories of women and the project immediately met with considerable success. In Bologna (which is our city), we began joining in a great many initiatives which also made us realize the real interest that our project was arousing. We thus took part in numerous public gatherings where all kinds of women came to talk about themselves. In so doing we had some decisive meetings which also helped us to refine our outlooks.

At that stage, we began thinking of practical decisions for the sake of making ourselves better heard.

The role of Valérie Donati, Marcella Mastrorocco and Stefania Prestopino proved decisive. These members of our executive make different contributions and high-quality ones. Each helps to make of *Donne Pensanti* a really varied and convincing association. And thus it was that *Donne Pensanti*, from being an informal group, has managed to become structured as an association whose governing board consists of these six people, but which is also made up of all the women and all the men who are constantly active in our community (which already numbers nearly 1,300), who write on our site, who participate in our initiatives in the city, and who also try to get territorial groups of the same kind operational in other Italian cities.

*Donne Pensanti* concerns itself with deconstructing the gender stereotypes that the media system does so much to crystallize by sidelining the particular and singular aspects of women. In addition, the association makes a point of offering testimonies – experiences, stories, creative experiments – which have in common a bid to set themselves apart from the prevailing models, in the notional and practical conviction that the colonization of the imaginary in which so many (especially young people) are today imprisoned must be combated by lending life and visibility to practices that will be able to link up memory and imagination.



For we are sure that, over and above the occasional denouncing of episodes and trends that bolster discrimination, and the action of which is so ingrained that nobody seems willing to take offence, other instruments need putting in place which will be able to undo these 'automatic perceptive reflexes' that have induced great segments of the Italian population to see nothing out of the ordinary in conditions which on the contrary are unjust and scandalous. At the heart of our project lies a desire to speak up again, since, as Hannah Arendt has written, the heart of politics is language (see the prologue to her *Vita activa* [1958], *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, 1999). We try to ensure this resumption of the floor through several textual – over and above the spoken word and writing: on our website we publish articles relating to with current events or more theoretical pieces; on our community there are a great many open discussions during which women (and men – this point counts for us) exchange views and knowledge.

We collected stories of women in a self-produced book entitled *Svegliatevi, bambine! – Voci dal pluriverso femminile* (Wake up, girls – Voices of the feminine plural); we made a video, [La vie en rose](#)<sup>1</sup>, which juxtaposes, with brief commentaries, shocking images taken from the advertising of (often very well-known) brands in which the woman's body is made use of, looked on as a mere commodity, ill-treated, and sometimes featured in fictional murders or simulated rapes. We have stepped in with articles and petitions intended to highlight current events and minor news items which seemed serious enough to us – when not quite simply tragic – to rule out silence. We have had no qualms about using irony when it came to commenting on the ever more numerous episodes from Italy's politics looking more and more like a comedy concocted from a debased day-to-day scene interspersed with television programmes constantly casting around for a wink and a nod. In short, retaking the floor was seen as a form of rebellion seeking to bring to the fore, by unexpected means, discordant voices that a stifling system bent on blanket approval has every interest in reducing to silence.

1. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqBaf0a5BGM>

In other words, *Donne Pensanti* springs from a desire to embody the constantly growing discontent of Italian women and men, with the real and symbolic aggressions suffered by the women of our country in effective, compact but not univocal action capable of fitting into cross-cutting movements that see various stakeholders united in a common struggle. We are convinced that the tendency for energies to be seeped away into countless minor channels is one of the results of the sort of disintegration that this new market society is causing and encouraging.

**M.R.: The name you gave to your association has caused some bewilderment even though it may have been a really clever idea. The point of course is not to lay claim to anything special about you (as though you were privileged to be the thinking women while the others are non-thinking, which entails a sort of metonymic hazard of your being labelled the thinking part of women), but to indicate a hidden dimension: the thinking of women (women, indeed all women think and so much so that one could alter the slant of Aristotle's famous maxim in his *Politics* to have it insist that woman is a thinking animal). It must nevertheless be said straight away that this thinking of women is not confused in your view with the quest for a way of thinking in the feminine. Could you tell us more about how you relate to thinking and to the philosophical tradition?**

**S.C.:** As I have explained, the name came in reaction to the context I have just described, to the reality in which our association took shape and that it intends to contest by overturning its assumptions and striking at its foundations. In contemporary Italy we found it necessary to highlight this aspect of the life of women at a time when women are reduced to the images that endlessly fill our everyday lives. So there is a metonymic effect, but not because we lay claim to the status of women who think as opposed to other women who do not, especially those who make questionable choices such as that of making themselves available to rich and powerful men for the sake of advantages and favours. That is not what comes into play.

Metonymy occurs rather because we have shown up, with the name of our association, one part of femininity: intelligence, the capacity to think in order to bring to mind a complex and varied ensemble from which one would not and could not wish to be segregated. In this respect I always like to recall what Hannah Arendt had to say. In reaction to the empire of superficiality, to the apparently hopeless confusion and to the complacent voicing of hollow 'truths', rolled out time and again, which already tainted the period (second half of the 1950s) when she wrote *Vita activa* in the United States, the philosopher advanced a proposal as simple as it was revolutionary: what was needed was quite simply once more to 'think about what we are doing'. It is thus in relation to that ever-receding plain truth that the name we chose for our association really comes into its own. That thinking gives rise to words and to acts in one and the same movement which does not separate but brings together these two dimensions, as was the case in Arendt's analyses and in the Greek experience of the *polis*.

But I should also like to cite a slightly unusual perception in relation to the perspective to which we are accustomed, which is very often too European or, in any case, Western. I was reading a few days ago in *Le harem et les européens* ('The Harem and the Europeans', Albin Michel, 2001) the observations of Fatema Mernissi about the image Europeans have formed of Scheherazade. She wrote those lines after seeing a Russian ballet in Berlin. According to her, in the Westernized version of the story the magnificent narrator of *The Thousand and One Nights* lacks the most powerful of her resources (the writer defines it in fact as an 'erotic weapon'), namely the 'capacity to translate thought into language'. There has been too much emphasis, in her view, on the body of Scheherazade and not enough on her brain, on her astute intelligence and on that marvellous imagination that enables her to charm the sultan and save her life. I am convinced for my part that the problem is not so much that of just focusing on the body of Scheherazade as that of overemphasizing a body that was misunderstood as it were, a body diminished because of being cut off from her stories and the real-life experience of which she was the living testimony.

Thinking, for women – but I think the same applies to men and in any case to those capable of in-depth self-examination – means staying in close contact with their own bodies, with their physical dimension. This bond is too often pushed aside to make way for a form of thinking which is still deeply marked by binary logics and exclusions, emphasizing one or other aspect while forgetting one or another aspect first while forgetting about their complementarity. This demarcation line drawn between the body and the mind has ended up devitalizing not only thought, but also the bodily dimension. For the outcome of this scission is that the body is ill-understood, as though bereft of its unsettling, rebellious potential; it finds itself inoffensive and aphasic.

**M.R.: Would you be prepared to make of these options the hallmark of a new feminism?**

**S.C.:** Yes, I think we would. It is a feminism which, on the basis of what I have just said, could be defined as an inclusive or aporetic feminism. By emphasizing that we are women, thinking individuals, there is also a desire to lend shape to this inclusive relationship in the conviction that, as a third way or middle path, new linkages are possible, far removed from binary opposites; we also intend to replace the binary and scornful logic of the either/or choice with a comprehensive approach capable of accommodating the articulated complexity of different and sometimes conflictual entities. This would be a logic of *and* – an ensemble of different and complementary truths, an adjacent space with all the porosities and uncertainties that a frontier implies, but also with all its innovatory and vivifying power, a place such that one forsakes the inherent contradictions in order to create what I could call for my part – with an also inclusive figure of rhetoric and I am not afraid of this paradox – concrete Utopian opportunities. This is diametrically opposed to the relativism of ‘weak thought’ (*pensiero debole*) which has been so much to blame in the erosion of our public-spiritedness and of our ethics, and which has all too often turned into a cynical and opportunistic realism deaf to any real chances of change.

Why therefore should we oppose body and mind? Why oppose word and praxis, or the individual and society? Such alternatives are misleading because it is in completeness and complexity that adult democracies are structured and that, as Roberta Monticelli writes in her latest book, *La questione morale* ('The Moral Question', Raffaello Cortina, 2010), 'human persons only become moral and civil subjects in the full sense of the term if they can become individuals, namely assume a stance in relation to the matter of living and sensitive sharing in which they were born and developed' (p. 56). What we have in fact is a composed process which can only become efficient by being fed through several strata and by opening up to several strata and opens up to several worlds, in both private and public concerns, in this linkage of realities that it has too long been sought to separate. The sense of what a state is supposed to be, of the *res publica*, can arise from what Paulo Freire, in the study he devoted to the marginalization of very considerable parts of the population of Northeast Brazil, called 'conscientization'. There is no experience of democracy and growth of democracy except on the basis of work of oneself on oneself, in the movement that brings anyone to becoming an adult citizen, by escaping a gregarious and servile existence (which is also the case when individuals choose to see themselves as autonomous individuals because the power mechanisms they are caught up into are regarded as irremediably anchored, alien, top-down and immutable).

It is also an 'inclusive feminism' inasmuch as it is extensively open to relations with other minority and marginalized subjects, but also with all those who perceive the cultural threat to the society in which we live and the forms of discrimination and oppression of every kind, together with the ever more frequent instances of day-to-day violence arising in such a context. It so happens that these persons are also convinced that collective awareness can bring about societal change. For there are some truths which, as Carla Lonzi writes, spring not from the individual but from the rapport itself.<sup>2</sup>

2. Italian writer and art critic Carla Lonzi (1931–1982) is one of the dominant figures of Italian feminism. As a theoretician of self-awareness and of sexual difference, she is the author of important works. She founded the Rivolta femminile publishing house. Cf. in an imposing bibliography: *Sputiamo su Hegel. La donna clitoridea e la donna vaginale e altri scritti*, Milan, Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, 1974; *È già politica. Testi di Marta Lonzi, Anna Jaquinta, Carla Lonzi*, Milan, Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, 1977; *La presenza dell'uomo nel femminismo. Testi di Maria Grazia Chinese, Carla Lonzi, Marta Lonzi, Anna Jaquinta*, Milan, Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, 1978 [translator's note].

In short, what we have in view is a feminism of the 'and', a rope stretched tight between two apparently irreconcilable extremes, and on which we have to advance if we want to be brave enough to take up this challenge that the Mozambican writer Mia Couto termed, in one of the neologisms of which he is fond, 'the challenge of the disequibrist'.

**M.R.: Given that any protest movement is rooted in a specific historical terrain, it seems clear to me that *Donne Pensanti* also arose as a reaction to the anti-feminist culture of Berlusconi times. As you are also the author of a notable essay on Berlusconi-ism and women, could you summarize what Berlusconi has done to women?<sup>3</sup> What he has done with them? With their culture? With their destiny?**

**S.C.:** Indeed the date of birth of *Donne Pensanti* is no mere chance. When our movement was in the early stages (early summer of 2009), the Italian (and European) newspapers were full of the revelations of Noemi Letizia and, shortly after the elections, those of the escort girl Patrizia d'Addario, whose revelations cast a sinister light on the prime minister. In her fine book *Pensare l'impossibile* ('Think the Impossible', Fandango, 2010), Anaïs Ginori defined 2009 as Year Zero for women. She situates the year as marked by two particularly disastrous Berlusconi sallies, the first dating from February. Berlusconi came out in opposition to the desire of the relatives of Eluana Englaro, who had said they intended to put an end to her artificial feeding, by arguing that the girl, who had been in a coma for seventeen years, could yet have children. The second incident came in October 2009. Speaking by telephone during a television programme, Berlusconi insulted Rosy Bindi (figure of the Italian Catholic left and several times minister), guilty of having emphasized the gravity of his affirmations about the prime minister. Without even addressing her, Berlusconi made sarcastic and ungracious comments on her appearance, calling her 'less beautiful than intelligent'.

3. See « *Così fan tutte. Berlusconismo e emancipazioni fallite* » in Carlo Chiurco, *Filosofia di Berlusconi; L'essere e il nulla nell'Italia del Cavaliere*, Verona, Ombre Corte, 2011, pp. 52-71 [translator's note].

One had the impression of having hit rock bottom. But what we have discovered in the last few weeks, with Berlusconi being accused of inciting a minor to prostitution, has made it clear that there was still plenty of digging to do below rock bottom.<sup>4</sup>

The dignity of women in Italy is systematically ignored and trampled on. And that starts with those who should be representing the institutions and therefore defending the dignity of citizens, both men and women, but those conscious of the cultural danger involved in all that are still few and far between. However, the latest revelations have served to extend the wave of indignation and dissent regarding Berlusconi.<sup>5</sup> On 13 February Italian women called on people to demonstrate, proposing action in all the country's major cities to demand the prime minister's resignation. They assembled more than a million Italians without the backing of parties or trade unions. Berlusconi is hugely responsible for the decline of the condition of women in Italy in the past twenty years. The macho psyche, crammed with the most worn-out clichés, admittedly has age-old roots in Italy. But it has been backed, encouraged and embodied by a head of government for whom women exist only as commodities, at the beck and call of his whims and fancies. As I wrote in the essay you mentioned, and which is included in the volume under the direction of Carlo Chiurco, *Filosofia di Berlusconi – L'essere e il nulla nell'Italia del Cavaliere*, I am convinced that the way Berlusconi relates to women is not just pathological. The pathology is undoubted but does not suffice to explain the extent and significance of the phenomenon. Berlusconi's television channels, which from the 1980s onwards have always given more place and importance to programmes in which women, sometimes extremely young, had a function that was purely decorative and entirely subordinated to the male audience, have represented an exceptional political laboratory serving as a catalyst in the anthropological degeneration that Pier Paolo Pasolini identified with his extraordinary lucidity back in the early 1970s and which has very old roots in a people having, at several decisive junctures in its history, displayed a sort of constitutive democratic immaturity.

4. This is a reference to an Italian pun on having hit rock bottom, but still digging below the bottom you've hit [translator's note].

5. Berlusconi's approval rating has dropped in two and a half years from 70 per cent to under 30 per cent [translator's note].

In Berlusconi's simplistic view, as in that of many of our fellow citizens, those in any case who feel represented by this man devoid of scruples and lacking any sense whatsoever of institutions, women are either saints or whores.

Behind these simplifications, however, there lurks an oppressive logic, which is that of biopower, the power exerted on bodies and via bodies. Women are then 'men's business' – they find themselves strategically domesticated, they are made docile and harmless by means of financial inducements or social promotion (when not, as is too often the case in Italy, political promotion), and they are usually unaware that they have been reduced to the status of radiant slaves, according to the expression of Italian writer, activist and teacher, Lea Melandri. What is worse is that they are often persuaded that they are the mistresses of their lot (when their lot is to be mistresses!), female figures of enterprises whose stock-in-trade is beauty and youth. In actual fact they are the objects (and not subjects) of a reality in which everything boils down to the market and where bodies are a mere commodity all the more valuable in that they can be sold several times to several buyers before becoming shop-soiled. For all those women who try to escape this conception of their existence and role, life in Italy has become harder still because society has finally got so used to forms of discrimination that many Italian women and men no longer even perceive them. The social fabric is decreasingly open to this otherness that women's entities still represent in many respects, and happily so.

Our struggle, like that of so many other groups and associations which make up a movement that is sidelined yet more and more impressive, arises from precisely that difficulty so well summed up by Gramsci's formula, which I believe offers more than one point of contact with the double-edged attempt which I have tried to describe and which characterizes our feminism. As Gramsci put it: we proceed, suspended between the pessimism of the intellect and the optimism of the will.



**M.R.: How do you see the role of the new technologies in your association? While many movements come into being before moving to the internet to lend greater visibility to their cause, you were born on the internet before giving yourself an associative body leading to several types of activity. Could you explain this linkage for us?**

**S.C.:** *Donne Pensanti* arises from an awareness that the internet offers extraordinary expressive and social possibilities which nevertheless have to be handled advisedly. As we wrote in our first manifesto, we originated on the internet without feeling prisoners of it. It seems to me that our association has succeeded in this respect and proves it by its impact in real life. Far from being just virtual or going astray in the meanders of the Web, as happens to many initiatives, this impact is substantial and it is shared in the real world. Having this correlation in mind from the outset allowed us to give birth to a movement that I could describe as 'glocal' because it is capable of capillary and distance dissemination thanks to the possibilities of internet communication that Francesca Stefano in particular knows very well, but at the same time it is driven by a very clear awareness of the need to take root territorially, to look one another in the eyes, to meet physically and to share discussions, laughter and reflections. This is what fosters relations that bring together old and new in a quite unusual way, far from any facile antithesis, and as it happens including and exploring new avenues together, letting new subjectivities emerge gradually, with their action, and to strike at this dominant paradigm which accounts for increasing numbers of victims and which, as is now evident, is the expression of ever more selfish and constricted interests.

**M.R.: How do you imagine today the future of thinking women and that of *Donne Pensanti* in Italy? What are your plans?**

**S.C.:** With regard to the situation of women who would like to oppose the discriminatory logics that mar our country, I can only refer to what I said before. As to our association, we shall continue to offer thinking women and men a space for communication and exchange. In addition, we shall move forward with our already well-oiled initiatives, with our protest actions, and with our practices of difference. We have already planned several other videos on rather hot topics; we shall concentrate on the women / work nexus (we offer on our site a counselling facility for women who suffer mobbing), we are in the process of gathering proposals to draw up a Decalogue for more women-friendly cities; and we shall continue collecting stories for our *Testimonia il femminile* project (the theme chosen for 2011 will be how women relate to the masculine).

We shall do relentless battle for our ideas – from day to day.

# Authors

## Authors

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