

# Women and philosophy

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Let us avoid getting caught up in a mere lament about the fact that 'woman', in addition to being, from time immemorial, alienated, beaten and deprived of political, sexual and social rights and legal identity, last and not least of all saw herself forbidden any access to philosophy: as far as a classification of the rights denied to women is concerned, it is clear that there is a disproportion between the right to have one's own salary and to decide one's own sexual destiny and that to philosophise, and that this disproportion can only leave the right to philosophise foundering in the anecdotal. Moreover, such a conception runs up against 'facts': certain periods have allowed some women to approach philosophy. Very few, you may say. Certainly, but how many men were there? Up to and including today, philosophy has concerned only a fringe - a minimal, indeed evanescent, one in certain periods - of what was itself a minority class. Sexist segregation seems of slight importance compared with the massive exclusion that has caused philosophy to remain the prerogative of a handful of the learned.

And we have every reason to be suspicious of such a lament, since it can lead to (at least) two so-called feminist positions with which we should have nothing to do. One, shamelessly exploited by the apologues of the 'advanced liberal society', consists in stating that the old times are changing and that we can enter into a contract of progress which will nullify and obliterate this long oppression. This kind of discourse, which from obvious political motives contrasts the past with the immediate future (already half present), can only be maintained by playing a game of abstraction, avoiding analysis of the concrete modalities of oppression, in support of a so-called 'established fact' of massive alienation, a fact which contrasts mystifyingly with once again abstract promises: this simplification plays into the hands of immediate ideologico-electoral exploitation. The other position with which we want to have nothing to do is dominated by a feminism of difference which is apparently unaware of how much it owes to Auguste Comte: 'Women have been forbidden access to the philosophic realm; rightly understood, this is something positive, and we do not demand access to it: this discourse is riddled with masculine values, and women should not be concerned with it; they must seek their specificity, their own discourse, instead of wanting to share masculine privileges.' We need not always or completely reject a feminism of difference. But when we can see in it the echo of a philosophy, namely Comte's positivism, of the discourse on women produced by a masculine philosophy, we must recognise that this kind of feminism may do the opposite of what it claims, that it may be misled by schemas produced by the very structures against which it is protesting. I shall oppose this mystification by the paradox that a practical application of philosophy is necessary in order to oust and unmask the alienating schemas which philosophy can produce.<sup>1</sup> For, whether we

like it or not, we are within philosophy, surrounded by masculine-feminine divisions that philosophy has helped to articulate and refine. The problem is to know whether we want to remain there and be dominated by them, or whether we can take up a critical position in relation to them, a position which will necessarily evolve through deciphering the basic philosophical assumptions latent in discourse about women. The worst metaphysical positions are those which one adopts unconsciously whilst believing or claiming that one is speaking from a position outside philosophy. Let this be a warning about what follows: this text probably involves certain 'naïveties', that is to say unconscious adherence to ideological structures which have not yet been completely deconstructed.

In order to try and get away from abstract lamentation, which is a major obstacle to answering the question 'what is to be done?', I shall begin by recalling some women who have approached philosophy. Their very existence shows that the non-exclusion (a relative non-exclusion) of women is nothing new, which will permit us to wonder whether anything has really changed - whether women are not admitted to philosophy today in accordance with modalities which reiterate an archaic permissiveness (and restriction).

## Women philosophers in the past

Some women, then, have had access to philosophical theorising; and let us add that the philosophical was not so forbidden to them that they had to pay for their transgression by losing their female nature in the eyes of observers. The woman who philosophises has not always or necessarily been seen as a monster. Indeed this is what makes one suspicious, permissiveness often signifying more than brutal exclusion. For example, Diogenes Laertius gives a portrayal of Hipparchia which betrays some esteem for her. Certainly, it seemed to him quite a feat that a woman should calmly adopt the cynic's way of life (and so it was), but no trace of mockery sullies his chapter on her. He relates the gibes to which Hipparchia (like all the Cynics) was subjected, but he dissociates himself from them, describing them as vulgar and stupid, and recounting with a certain admiration the *bons mots* with which this 'woman philosopher' replied to tasteless jokes. In the eyes of Diogenes Laertius, it is not femininity that Hipparchia renounced (the expression 'woman philosopher' prevent one thinking that), but, as indeed she said herself, the loss of self implied in the female condition ('I spent all the time which, in view of my sex, I should have wasted at the spinning-wheel to study.')

Similarly, the access to the philosophical of Heloise or Elisabeth (Descartes' correspondent, who is recorded in history under that one christian name)<sup>2</sup> has never been characterised as a loss of the mythical advantages of femininity: the antagonism between 'being a woman' and 'being a gentleman' seems to have come later and, I believe, it is not

<sup>1</sup> Needless to say, this theoretical practice, though necessary, is also completely insufficient.

<sup>2</sup> Princess Elisabeth of Palatine, dedicatee of Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy* and *The Passions of the Soul*

until Rousseau (Emile, Part 5) and Comte that access to philosophy is described in terms of danger, of mutilation, even of degradation. So let us take care not to project historically specific schemes onto the whole of history. For a woman to approach philosophical study is not such an outrage as one might suppose from reading Les Femmes Savantes: in the same period Madame de Sévigné gently teased her Cartesian daughter about vortices, without appearing to think that reading Descartes was leading her daughter away from 'her true character', from a 'feminine nature', in danger of 'fatal degradation' (all these words are from Comte). A century later Rousseau wrote: 'Believe me, wise mother, do not make a gentleman of your daughter.'

However, both Theodorus (the malicious joker who attacked Hipparchia) and Molière are very useful witnesses; for by suggesting a different reaction from that of Diogenes Laertius or Descartes, they enable one to evaluate or interpret the attitude of these last. There seem to be two points of view, that of the semi-clever and that of the more cunning. The semi-clever argue that there really is a prohibition. As for the clever, they have a more subtle relationship with the prohibition, a relationship which can be described as permissive, as long as it is understood that permissiveness is a cunning form of prohibition, opposed to everything that comes under the heading transgression or subversion.

For at first an explicit prohibition does not need to be put forward: at the moment in history where the discourse called philosophy arises, a sexual division in education and instruction is already well established. 'Girls would learn only to spin, weave and sew, and at most to read and write a little' (Engels, Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State). Imposing limits on the culture of women is quite sufficient to bar them from the philosophical, and their (unspoken) exclusion<sup>3</sup> from philosophy is an epiphenomenon, at least at first sight, of the distinction between what it is appropriate to teach a girl and what a cultivated man needs to know. Similarly, the education of the daughters of the aristocracy in the 17th century is essentially linked to the idea of 'social graces': what is important is to give them an attractive wit, pleasant conversation, and to teach them Italian and singing. And when Hegel writes that: 'women may have culture, ideas, taste, and elegance: but they cannot attain to the ideal', he is repeating on a theoretical level a division already inscribed in actual 'masculine' and 'feminine' forms of education. And at this point there arises a question that I shall only mention: is there a historical change in the relationship of philosophers to women towards the middle of the 18th century? Plato had not felt the need to theorize the sexual distinction of education in his day and he did not propose to maintain it in the just city. Twenty centuries later Thomas More was equally 'egalitarian', not only in his Utopia but also in the education he gave to the boys and girls who lived in his house. On the other hand, it seems that references to women's incapacity to theorise begin to flower from the 18th century onwards. The whole period establishes and re-establishes divisions and distinctions: divisions of literature/philosophy, techniques of the attractive/art (cf. Rousseau's Essay on the Origin of Languages, for example), ideas/ideals, culture/knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> The deliberate exclusion of women from philosophical work is not necessarily explicitly stated. This is not true of the exclusion of feminism, a point to which we shall return.

How a sexual division (of faculties, aptitudes, and intellectual destinies) is connected with these different separations, and why this redistribution is emphasised at this time (today it continues as an ideological 'accepted fact'), is a question that deserves more attention than I can devote to it here.

So let us return to the permissiveness shown to those few women who did (but how, and to what extent?) approach philosophy. First let us note that although they lived in very different times, these women had one thing in common: they all experienced great passions, and their relationship to philosophy passed through their love for a man, a particular philosopher: 'Hipparchia fell so passionately in love with the doctrine and way of life of Crates that no suitor, however rich, noble or handsome, could turn her from him. She went so far as to tell her parents she would kill herself if she could not have her Crates.' And Heloise experienced an analogous confusion of amorous and didactic relationships, a confusion which can be well described by the concept of transference. The relationship of Elisabeth to Descartes, though more discreet, seems to me to be of a similar nature. Descartes was 'the one who knows', the one who is asked for knowledge (and not just any knowledge: you who know everything, tell me how to be happy despite all my troubles) and of whom one wants to be a favourite disciple, an intelligent reader, a 'good pupil'.

An unimportant psychological matter? That is not so clear. It can already be noticed that this erotico-theoretical transference (that is to say, simply this transference) is equivalent to an absence of any direct relationship of women to philosophy. It is only through the mediation of a man that women could gain access to theoretical discourse. Here we find a predicament common to the feminine condition, that of not being able to do without a protector and mediator in any part of life defined as social. Moreover, the necessity of this mediation seems to me to be inscribed not so much in a prohibition which would directly affect philosophy for women, but in a much simpler prohibition, and a much more radical exclusion. Until the Third Republic women did not have access to institutions which taught philosophy. What 'well-bred', 'respectable' Greek woman could have registered at a school, and attended the lectures of Plato or Aristotle? Before even requesting admission, they would have had to be able to leave the gynaecium: access to philosophy as it was dispensed institutionally would have meant a break with the customary, material framework of the feminine condition. Diogenes Laertius does in fact mention a woman, Themista, in his list of Epicurus' disciples; but she had followed her husband Leontyas of Lampasque to Epicurus' garden. In the Middle Ages women left the home more, but universities were closed to them (I am not even talking about Moslem universities), even to those who were destined to be abbesses. This is the starting point for the story of Peter Abelard and Heloise: it was out of the question for Heloise to mingle with the audience of five thousand at Abelard's lectures at the École du Cloître de Notre-Dame. So Abelard gave her private lessons in grammar and dialectic. Such 'private' teaching is obviously much more likely to go beyond the didactic sphere than is a public lecture. Francine Descartes would not have been able to enter her father's college of la Flèche. It's quite funny to see Hegel write that 'women are educated - who knows how? - as it were by

breathing in ideas' and above all to see him attribute this to the feminine nature (a plant-like, botanical nature bathed in the spirit of the times), whilst the 'who knows how?' is merely the result of the impossibility of entering colleges and universities, where, it is supposed, it is known how knowledge is transmitted.

## A school for women?

This curious form of transference seems to me to be basically the price that women pay for the amateur position to which they are condemned. Only an institutional relationship, with a place and meaning in an organised framework, can avoid the hypertrophy of the personal relationship between master and disciple. But why does philosophical didactics have such a tendency to become erotic? Why does it tend to adhere (overtly) to an instinctive realm, so that only a third external factor (call it 'the school') can confine it to a didactic field? I believe that philosophical didactics itself tends to take the form of a dual transference relationship, and that it is obviously not women who pervert this relationship and divert it towards the instinctive realm. For, once the special relationship of women to philosophy is recognised, it is tempting to rule out the peculiarity in the case of men. In fact, you - Pierre, Paul or Sebastian, with whom I went to the Sorbonne, prepared the *agrégation* or taught in a suburban secondary school - have you acted any differently than Hipparchia? With you there have always been times when it has been possible to detect in the knotting of tie, in a hairstyle or some such caprice, a symbol of allegiance to some teacher or other. And one need only listen to your accounts of your school and academic career. There has always been - at school, at university, in the preparatory courses for university, most often in the latter in fact - a teacher around whom there has crystallised something analogous to the theoretico-amorous admiration of women that we are talking about. One thing I am sure of is that this privileged teacher is the one who finally seduced you to philosophy, who captured your desire and turned it into a desire for philosophy. But there is a considerable difference between these studying companions and Elisabeth or Sophie Volland;<sup>4</sup> in general, the 'godfather' relationship has opened up the whole field of philosophy to the disciple's desire, whilst women's transference relationships to the theoretical have only opened up to them the field of their idol's own philosophy. I say 'in general' because there are also 'failures' with men, and disciples may remain philosophers of particular schools (read 'cliques'), and never get beyond a repetitious discourse. This repetition, far from being a monster come from god knows where, is only a special form of a general situation. And the peculiar image of philosophising women is only peculiar because certain modalities of philosophic didactics are kept hidden and Plato's *Phaedrus* is either never understood or regularly half-rejected: it was the Greeks, it was the peculiarity of the Platonic doctrine ... when perhaps one should take it seriously, as a general characteristic of the philosophic journey, without however taking it literally or word for word. The *Phaedrus* is a text which has yet to be unravelled and deciphered, and, first of all, rescued from the university tradition's strategies of asepticising, neutralising and euphemising it.

The reason why men (both now and in the past)

can go beyond the initial transference, and why the love component of their transference is sublimated or inflected from the very beginning, so that it can return to the theoretical, is that the institutional framework in which the relationship is played out provides the third factor which is always necessary for the breaking of the personal relationship; the women amateurs, however, have been bound to the dual relationship because a dual relationship does not produce the dynamics that enable one to leave it. The result of imprisonment in such a relationship is that philosophising women have not had access to philosophy, but to a particular philosophy, which, it seems to me, is something very different. Their relationship to the philosophical is limited, from outside the theoretical field, by the relationship from which they could not possibly detach themselves. Being definitively committed to one particular form of thought seems to me to be the negation of the philosophical enterprise. 'Woman should have no other religion than that of her husband' - which does not prevent this religion being a religion - quite the contrary - and Rousseau is right about this. A woman has the philosophy of her tutor-lover: but then she is no longer within the philosophical enterprise, to the extent that she avoids (is forbidden) a certain relationship to the lack, the particular lack from which, in my opinion, philosophy stems, a radical lack which the Other cannot fill. Let us recall for example the *Phaedo* or the *Discourse on Method*. In both cases we are given the account of a disappointment and a frustration in teaching: 'I imagined I had found the man who would teach me ... but he disappointed me.' (97c-99d). The disappointment begins the story of the 'great pains' the subject then went to in trying to fill the lack. There is nothing like this in the relationship of women of the past to their master's philosophy: he knows all, his philosophy has an answer to everything. It was not the philosophical lack that Hipparchia, Heloise and Elisabeth experienced, but the 'ordinary', 'classic', 'psychological' lack so to speak, the one where the Other is seen as likely to fulfill.<sup>5</sup> No room then for 'great pains': these women were not condemned to philosophise - nor to write.

Thus we can begin to understand the permissiveness of the really cunning, of those who understood what philosophising means. We are beginning to understand why these women were necessary to their masters (although the men's need for them could produce some ambivalent feelings; this is particularly true of Crates). The theoretical devotion of a woman is very comforting for someone experiencing his own lack; for it is not only the teachings of Anaxagoras or of the Jesuits that are objects of disappointment: the discourse of Socrates or of Descartes reiterates the lack in knowledge. How can it not be gratifying to be seen as a completeness when one is caught in incompleteness and disappointment? We still smile at the court of women who flocked round Bergson, but we systematically forget to wonder whether this court was not in fact satisfying (or inspired by) Bergson's own desire. The fact that this court was composed of women who were following the College de France lectures in an amateur capacity (without expecting qualifications, cashable university diplomas, from them) seems to me significant.

Hipparchia and her great-nieces would be of no interest to us if these women could not provide us with a negative of the actual situation, or of what

<sup>4</sup> Friend and correspondent of Diderot

<sup>5</sup> One should perhaps refer here to the concept of 'need'.

the actual situation might be. Looking at history mechanically, one might think that now that women have institutional access to philosophy the block of transferential femininity no longer has any rationale and that therefore it has ceased to exist. But this is not the case: the danger of amateurism and the particular position it implies is still there, the only difference being that our female predecessors were condemned to it, while we are merely exposed to it. Virginia Woolf said that in order to write a woman needed at least a room of her own and an income of five hundred pounds. I would say that in order to philosophise a woman needs both a room of her own and the necessity of earning her living by philosophising (she must not have avoided this possibility). Today a system of real constraints is needed to counterbalance another subtle system of prohibitions and discouragements. A woman who was in the position of not having to fit into the university and professional constraints of the philosopher's job would be liable to find herself in a role which was ready made for her.

## Your atrophy, my fullness

This system of discouragements is linked primarily to philosophical anti-feminism. It would be all too easy to compile a large book based on the horrors voiced by philosophers, notably from the 18th century onwards, on the subject of women. Here I shall quote only three texts: 'The search for abstract and speculative truths, for principles and axioms in the sciences, for all that tends to wide generalisation, is beyond a woman's grasp; their studies should be thoroughly practical. It is their business to apply the principles discovered by men, it is their place to make the observations which lead men to discover those principles. . . . The men will have a better philosophy of the human heart, but she will read more accurately into the heart of men. Woman should discover, so to speak, an experimental morality, man should reduce it to a system. Woman has more wit, man more genius; woman observes, man reasons.' (Rousseau, *Emile*, Everyman trans. p350). 'Women are capable of education, but they are not made for activities which demand a universal faculty such as the more advanced sciences, philosophy and certain forms of artistic production. Women may have happy ideas, taste, and elegance, but they cannot attain to the ideal. The difference between men and women is like that between animals and plants; men correspond to animals, while women correspond to plants because their development is more placid and the principle that underlies it is the rather vague unity of feeling. When women hold the helm of government, the State is at once in jeopardy, because women regulate their actions not by the demands of universality, but by arbitrary inclinations and opinions. Women are educated - who knows how? - as it were by breathing in ideas, by living rather than by acquiring knowledge. The status of manhood, on the other hand, is attained only by the stress of thought and much technical exertion.' (Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, para. 166, Zusatz, trans. Knox p263-4). And finally Auguste Comte, whom certain people are valiantly trying to bring into fashion today - which is paradoxical for, whether one reads him or not, he is the unconscious inspiration of numerous discourses, not only on women: 'It is in order to better develop her moral superiority that woman must gratefully accept the rightful practical domination of man. . . . First as a mother, and soon as a sister, then above all as a wife, and finally as

a daughter, marginally as a maid-servant, in these four natural roles woman is destined to preserve man from the corruption inherent in his practical and theoretical existence. Her emotional superiority directly gives her this fundamental duty, which social economy develops increasingly by releasing the loving sex from all disturbing cares, active or speculative.' (*Système de politique positive*, Tome II)

This anti-feminism can be analysed in various ways. If we emphasise the date of these texts, we can see in them the affirmation of bourgeois values against the entirely relative permissiveness of the aristocracy with respect to feminine culture in the 18th century. It would still remain to be explained why it was the bourgeoisie who were anxious to confine woman to the sphere of feelings ('love is an episode in men's lives and the whole story of women's') when the psychology of the royal age (Racine) had not laid down any fundamental inequality between man and woman with respect to passion (in the *Traité des passions* Descartes does not refer to sexual differences). Nevertheless it can be noted that this restriction to the emotional is correlative to the expression of a speculative and philosophical incapacity, in which case this pseudo-anthropology goes beyond the limits of social history and must also be interpreted in the light of the philosophical implications of the situation. It may be that before the 18th century it was not necessary to develop a defence of philosophy against women (it is not Molière's problem for example); but the philosophical salons, and then someone like Madame de Stael, perhaps went too far for the liking of the philosophers of the time; these men could easily have afforded to be permissive to the point of allowing a Heloise-like relationship to philosophy (cf. Julie, and even she repents in time). But because of women's comparatively aggressive attack on philosophy at the time, they were forced to withdraw into a more sheltered position, clinching the truth of the malicious Theodorus, and become idiots of prohibition; which was very much in the interests of their successors who, thanks to them, were able to appear liberal. But what were they worried about? Where is the threat to philosophy in women being capable of it? It might be suggested that the so-called sovereignty of philosophy is at stake here. Philosophy, queen of the sciences. . . . When a respected activity admits women it loses value: this is not the result of some rigorous scientific sociology, it is a theorem of intuitive commonplace 'sociology' (look at medicine in the USSR! Since women have been admitted to it, doctors have lost their prestige, and are no longer respected!). It may be the great dignity of philosophy that keeps women away from it; conversely, for this great dignity to be maintained, women must be kept away. Bachelard's ectoplasm whispers to me that philosophy reigns today merely in the fashion of the Queen of England, and one can envisage repealing the Salic Law. In this respect, Hegel's comparison between women's incapacity to govern and their unsuitability for philosophising would be significant, in that political power, whether exercised by a man or a woman, remains power, because it is based on real means of coercion, whilst the hegemony of the philosophical is more fragile, and therefore has to defend its 'ascendancy' more forcefully; and it is significant that the few women rulers of the time - Christine of Sweden and Catherine II - did have access to philosophy.

It might also be suggested that the lack from which the philosophical enterprise stems is, in a man's eyes, inadmissible in a woman. It must not be forgotten that phallogocentrism also contains the theory of a phallopandaea. It is well known that all a woman needs to fulfil her every desire is a good husband. In fact it is woman's desire that has always been minimized, since it is often thought that toys are enough for them. What! a man is not sufficient to make them feel complete? And there is Madame de Staël regarded as a castrating bitch and vilified by generations of critics. Look at what Lagarde and Michard say of this 'female reasoner', this 'formidable schemer' who attempted to 'play a prominent role' despite her 'superficial views', her 'lack of art' and her 'ugliness'. On re-reading Les Femmes Savantes one could suggest that Clitandre makes a similar reproach to Armande ('But your eyes did not consider their conquest fine enough').

But all these explanations are not enough. The exclusion of 'woman' is perhaps more consubstantial with the philosophical, and less historically definable than our quotations from the 18th and 19th centuries might lead one to believe. The 18th century had women to exclude, real, concrete women who had reached the limits of the permissible. But this historically specific struggle re-awakened much older elements which until then could afford to remain implicit. Plato's Phaedrus does not say that women must be excluded from the dialectical enterprise. But with Zeus in love with Ganymede serving as an example, it is clear that this is not women's business. Moreover, the story of the little Thracian servant-girl in the Theaetetus (a juvenile version of Xanthippe?) shows a feminine vulgarity which is obviously far removed from disinterested research. These older elements, re-activated at the end of the 18th century, could be seen as an attempt to mask the nature of the philosophical, or as an effort to reinsure its always problematic positivity. Women would be summoned here in an illusory guise, as a purely negative otherness, as an atrophy which, by contrast, guarantees a philosophical completeness. I say atrophy, and not negativity, because in the Hegelian perspective it is, in a way, women's lack of negativity that is in question. 'Woman is woman through a certain lack of qualities' (Aristotle): the Hegelian perspective is not far from this definition in that it is the passage through the negative that has become the missing quality. And woman's placid botanical development, falling short of anguish, serves as a foil to the real and substantial completeness of the philosophical, which, having conquered work, effort, suffering and thought, is beyond torment. Here women pay the cost of a defence, as, elsewhere, do children, the people, the ordinary man, or the 'savage' (whose image has not been entirely formed by ethnologists; it owes a lot to what the historians of philosophy have said about the 'reasoning deficiency' in 'pre-socratic' peoples). But what must one defend oneself against then? From remaining indefinitely at the moment of torment perhaps, from not producing any knowledge of the level of one's standards of validation? 'We have an incapacity for proof, insurmountable by all dogmatism' (Pascal, Pensées 395). The incapacity of philosophical speculation, the fragility of all metaphysical constructions, the lack, the anguish, that torment every 'world system' are not radically unknown to the philosopher. The reference to women (or to any other

subject 'unfitted' for philosophy) allows this powerlessness to be overlooked, for there it is projected, in a radicalised form, onto a subject who is even situated on this side of the search for speculative truths. Or again, the fact that there is someone incapable of philosophising is comforting because it shows that philosophy is capable of something. It is perhaps this relationship of philosophy to woman that we encounter in the transferences described above. The theoretical devotion of a woman is the distorting mirror which transforms bitterness into satisfaction. But in that case prohibition and permissiveness play the same role.

## In vino veritas

So it is perhaps the distribution of roles by philosophy (which is necessary for its comfort) which forms the first barrier to women's effective access to the philosophical; and if this barrier still exists, the (only very relative) progress represented by women's access to the institutional teaching of philosophy, is all for nothing. Not to mention the imaginary portrait of 'woman', a power of disorder nocturnal, a dark beauty, a black continent, sphinx of dissolution, the depths of the unintelligible, mouth-piece of the underworld gods, an internal enemy who corrupts and perverts without any sign of combat, a place where all forms fade away. This portrait is not unrelated to metaphysics. In the list of Pythagorean oppositions (given in Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy Vol. I) one finds the following:

limit and infinity  
unity and multiplicity  
masculine and feminine  
light and dark  
good and evil

This list (and the associations which it suggests) is probably not out of date. There is undoubtedly in many men an unconscious, almost superstitious feeling of repugnance at the sight of women approaching philosophy. They could sour the wine in the precious barrels of the Gorgias. But where does this imagery come from? It would be much too convenient to explain it in terms of archaic 'direct experiences', or of an unconscious constituted prior to metaphysics, which, like a 'primitive soul' would to our regret come and express itself where it shouldn't. This would be absolving metaphysics of all responsibility, which hardly seems possible to me: when one is in the presence of an 'unconscious' which is structured like a metaphysic, and whose schemas are congruent with this metaphysic, it is impossible to say, first, that this is an unconscious, and then not admit that one is in the presence of a reject of this metaphysic. There may be a future for this reject in the collective imagination, but this is another story. For the moment let us be content with appreciating the idea of a 'black continent', a femininity of chaos, from metaphysics. And perhaps first of all one should, with certain modifications, take this passage from Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind seriously: 'Since the community gets itself subsistence only by breaking in upon family happiness and dissolving self-consciousness into the universal, it creates its enemy for itself within its own gates, creates it in what it suppresses, and what is at the same time essential to it - womankind in general. Womankind - the everlasting irony in the life of the community - changes by intrigue the universal purpose of government into a private end...'



(trans. Baillie p496). I propose nothing less than transposing this text into the field of the question of philosophy, adding that the philosophical creates that which it represses. In the first place, it must be noted that the discourse which we call 'philosophical' produces itself through the fact that it represses, excludes and dissolves (or claims to dissolve) another discourse, another form of knowledge, even though this other discourse or form of knowledge may not have existed before this process. That philosophical discourse is a discipline, that is to say a discourse obeying (or claiming to obey) a finite number of rules, procedures or processes, and that as such it represents a closure, a definition which denies the undefined character and modes of thought (even if this character is only potential), a damming up, a limitation of the number of possible (admissible) statements, is nothing new. The simple fact that philosophical discourse is a discipline is sufficient to show that something is repressed within it. But what is repressed? The reply is either too easy or too delicate. Too easy if one is content to quote the list of philosophy's historically varying exclusions: rhetoric, the seductive discourse, inconclusive syllogisms, occultism ('let me not be accused of returning to occult forms'), analogical reasoning and arguments from authority. These are mere anecdotes. I would suggest, rather, that this something that philosophy labours to keep at bay cannot be properly defined. It is not and cannot be defined, perhaps because it is precisely the undefined, or alternatively because philosophy is just the formal idea that discourse must involve exclusion or discipline, that admissible modes of thought cannot be undefined. It is perhaps a general form of exclusion, capable of receiving several components, but not itself bound to any particular component. This is why the object of exclusion is not properly definable. But then this nameless, undefined object, this indeterminate otherness, can only be described metaphorically, I mean by making use of an available signifier, seized upon by philosophical discourse to pinpoint a difference. A signifier is, of course, a term expressing some discrimination. And the man/woman difference is summoned to symbolise the general opposition between defined/undefined, that is to say validated/excluded, an opposition of which the logos/mythos couple represents one form, for the mythos is 'an old wives tale', or the inspiration of a Diotima. But in so far as the activity of separation, of division, is philosophically creative (the field is created by its exclusions), philosophy creates itself in what it represses, and, this object of repression being essential to it, is constantly separating, enclosing and insularising. And the old wives' tales and nursery teaching are always 'obscuring' the clear light of the concept - not because of some dynamic belonging to the object of repression in general, but because the finite collection of admissible procedures is not sufficient. All thought presupposes an undefined area, a certain play of structures, a certain liberty around the codified procedures. Thus shadow is within the very field of light and woman is an internal enemy. For, in defining itself through negation, the philosophical creates its other it engenders an opposite which, from now on, will play the role of the hostile principle, the more hostile because there is no question of dispensing with it. Femininity as an internal enemy? Or rather the feminine, a support-signifier of something that, having been engendered by philosophy whilst being

rejected by it, operates within it as an indispensable deadweight which cannot be dialectically surpassed.

One might well say quite bluntly that women (real women) have no need to be concerned by that femininity; we are continuously compared with that image, but we do not have to recognise ourselves in it. I stress this in order to prevent the repetition, in our topic, of the 'paradoxes' which are current today about madness, that reason first excludes unreason but that it is nevertheless reason which speaks of unreason. In the same way it would be too easy to say that the discourse I am presenting is being presented from the philosophical point of view, that it is yet another colonising discourse, and that femininity is not allowed to express itself here any more than in the texts of Hegel. As soon as one considers this femininity as an illusory reject from conflicts within the field of reason assimilated to masculinity, it is out of the question to try to let it express itself. We will not talk pidgin to please the colonialists.

However that is exactly what is expected of us. Under the heading 'the best soup is made in old pots', look at L'Ange for example: 'It is time to spotlight once more Greek frankness, to say that in fact the slave and the woman lack reason; that when a slave, qua slave, a woman, qua woman, reason about the slave and the woman, they can only talk nonsense. The bet I want to have against Freud, that there is an autonomous discourse of the rebel, can only be maintained if today an unheard discourse now breaks out - even if it has always existed - that of those who lack reason. This I know but I can only announce it rationally.' (Lardreau p37, note 1). This is incredible: I, who am neither slave nor woman, know however (and doubtless I am the only one to know, slaves and women don't) what the nature of your discourse should be, slave and woman. Knowledge about women has always been masculine property (in which case L'Ange is not announcing anything). It is time to return, not to Greek frankness, but to elementary historical materialism to recall that it is slave society which says that the slave is a being without reason; that patriarchal societies are fond of repeating that woman is a dear being without reason; and that colonialist societies proclaim that the negro, or the savage, is a being without reason. And it is too much in the interest of power always to attribute the privilege of reason to it - just as it shows a somewhat unjustified complacency to announce 'rationally' something that can only be sustained by the pleasure one finds in it. Men are held to have a reasoned or rational discourse about woman, whilst woman qua woman (here Monsieur Lardreau seems to have invented the wire with which to make epistemo-ontological cuts in the black continent so that we end up schizoid without admitting it) whilst women can only talk nonsense! I will content myself with contrasting this old division with the fact that it is enough for one question concerning the feminine condition to be at the National Assembly for all the debates to be transformed into a psychodrama where fantasies unfold which it never occurs to their 'authors' to censure. The debate on contraception in 1967 was a prime example of this. Is it necessary to recall it? Men talked and raved with total assurance, without the slightest self-control or any hint of reasoning. It is probably exactly the same when anti-feminist men talk about women: they project their desires and anguish, and attempt

to pass off this discourse of desire and defence as a rational theoretical discourse. Luce Irigaray has demonstrated this very well in relation to Freud.

## Incompleteness or tutelage

From what position is one to speak then? Not from that other-position produced by philosophy as a preserve of purely negative otherness. Nor from within metaphysics since this supports the masculine-rationality/feminine-disorder division. But there are other possibilities. For logocentrism is not the ineluctable presupposition (or hypothesis) of any rational position. By this I mean (and I am not the first to say it) that, up to now, logocentrism has left its mark on the entire history of philosophy, separating this history from what could be a 'history of ideas' and turning it into the reiteration of a 'fundamental' thesis, that of the power of true discourse. A discourse is philosophical if it expresses the power of philosophy, (confused with the possession of true knowledge). This can be noted, for example, in the ethical and political fields - look at the concept of wisdom or the figure of the philosophical and providential legislator. Even the materialists of Antiquity do not escape this defence of true knowledge, this in fact being precisely what defined them as philosophers. Today it is possible to think out rationality otherwise than in the hegemonic mode. It is possible, but not easy or straightforward. It is the aim of a struggle, not an immediately available historical acquisition. This struggle was begun by historical materialism, in so far as this is a rationalism which renounces the idea of the omnipotence of knowledge. From here on one can trace a new form of philosophy, as a fellow-traveller of conflicts which arise outside its realm and which, similarly, will be resolved (if at all) outside it, not by means based on its power. Which is nevertheless to announce not the extinction of the philosophical enterprise, but rather a change which is quite difficult to think through.

The fact remains that this change is likely to alter the interlocking of the 'philosophical' and the 'feminine', for it is now possible to stop wishing to mask the incomplete nature of all theorization. That knowledge is always lacking, but nevertheless necessary ('ignorance has never done anyone any good' Marx once said) permits one to understand the economics of the logocentric-phallocratic illusion. But this new position on knowledge is still far from being established. Since for the last twenty-five centuries philosophers have been comparing the world to a theatre and philosophy to a tragedy, relating this metaphor to the close of the performance that makes a well-finished whole of the play, I would say that the future of a philosophy that is no longer anti-feminist is being performed somewhere in the direction of Brechtian drama, which (I am not the first to say it) produces unfinished plays which always have a missing act and are consequently left wide open to history. Insisting on philosophy's lack, while making of this lack the condition of its insertion into historical reality, allows philosophy to be moved towards a position where the choice between a hegemonic reason and a revolt of unreason takes on the appearance of a metaphysical opposition, which is to say of connivance or complicity between forms which present themselves as opposites.

While waiting for such a stance about knowledge to gain more than a marginal place in philosophical practice, there persists the discourse, still

dominant today, of a philosophical science which is above suspicion. And for women the game is far from being won. The fact that archaic permissiveness continues seems to me to indicate this. Bergson is dead, but the need for theoretical adulation has not been buried with him: the mandarins still need to be transference objects, and, moreover, they are not the only ones. I am not telling women who have already studied philosophy anything new: they surely remember male fellow students trying to take us under their wing. And the less we need this support (the more we seek to get by without masters), the more insistently is this protection offered to us. Faced with a woman, a philosophy student often attempts to adopt the stance of 'he who knows', who knows what books to read, what one should think of the reading proposed by the critic of a certain great philosopher, what courses are worth following etc. These protector-candidates find it difficult to imagine a woman relating directly to philosophy (or even to the teaching of philosophy). Such an attitude can be seen as the reproduction of the relationship they had with their favourite master, or as an attempt to become masters in their turn. As if becoming the object of a transference were the only way of resolving one's own transference. In this way, many young women definitively abdicate all conceptual self-determination in the course of their studies and allow themselves to be guided by a male fellow student who is supposed to be more brilliant than them. I hope I am right when I add that this seems to happen less today than ten years ago. Perhaps women have got better at resisting the annexation attempts that they are subject to. If this is true then it must be attributed to the growth of the women's movement. But before these dead-end transference relationships can disappear, we must change the very conception of philosophy - this 'we' referring here not only to women, but to all those who are ready to adopt the meaning of modernity completely (including the loss of narcissistic satisfactions).

It may be said that I am inventing this survival of the Heloise-like relationship to philosophy. 'From now on I will take you in hand,' he said when he announced my success in the agregation to me. 'How many Jean-Pauls who never became Sartres have said this to Simones who never became feminists? The outrageousness of this conclusion of the first volume of Simone de Beauvoir's autobiography, Memoirs of a dutiful daughter often goes unnoticed. It's considered normal. To me, this theoretical 'taking in hand' (and its correlative: the fact that Simone de Beauvoir was confined to the feminine condition, that is to say accepted a ready-made philosophy, or that, in accepting existentialism as a constituted doctrine, she was excluded from the philosophical enterprise), does indeed seem 'normal', that is to say overdetermined by philosophical and historical conditions. What I find very difficult to understand is that Simone de Beauvoir relates this episode years later without any hint of critical hindsight, even after writing The Second Sex.

Before leaving the problem of transference I should like to add that it is perhaps the danger of subjugation as the price of amateurism, which explains why certain women take such a conformist attitude to university sanctions. This conformity (concern about obtaining university qualifications, preference for recognised forms of work, such as a doctoral thesis in place of less academic research) is perhaps conceived of as a convenient

antidote to, or as a means of resisting, the pressures to make us into great readers or precious admirers. Investing as much as possible in the institution can also appear as a conquest, when an institutional relationship to philosophy has been forbidden for so long. The irony is that today philosophical work does not lie in the direction of academic work. But it takes more confidence to offer a manuscript to an editor than to submit a thesis subject. Having been trapped in dual relationships, women are now in danger of burying themselves in a relationship to narrowly university-defined institutions. Besides, the value of the institutional relationship as an antidote is very problematic. Is this a denial or sublimation of the transference relationship? To examine this question we would first have to refine our categories of 'transference' and of 'dual relationship' (and in particular, to ask whether the transference does not retain a disguised form when the dual relationship is repudiated or suppressed) which is materially impossible here.

## Anti-feminism and exams

At all events, it cannot be said that the institution welcomes them with open arms (except in the Heloise-role described above), that is to say, recognises their philosophical capacities. For example, one often sees the 'masters' (teaching either in a preparatory class or in a university) choosing 'followers', that is to say transmitting a flattering image of themselves to some of their pupils. This attitude is part of an important process of over-stimulations which organise the future take-over, and which indicate, often precociously, those who are going to feel 'called' (and in fact are) to play a so-called leading role in the philosophical enterprise. The teachers' sexist and socio-cultural prejudices take on a considerable importance in this period of philosophical apprenticeship. Many women are aware of the unconscious injustice of numerous teachers; young men who have been selected 'followers', often, moreover, for obscure reasons, while women constantly have to fight for recognition. Incidentally, the personal involvement of teachers in this search for an heir apparent needs to be analysed. Perhaps this too is a question of an avatar, this time 'from man to man', of the lack which torments the master and which, in the 'man to woman' case leads to a search for female admirers. This sexist distribution of favouritism certainly has to be denounced, but the mere existence of this type of behaviour must be criticised first. Besides, it would be useful to investigate the precise moment in the school or university course at which the teachers' sexist prejudices are at their most effective as an instrument of selection. My impression is that it occurs later than the selection based on socio-cultural criteria.

However, this fundamental aspect of philosophical studies remains unofficial and the system of exclusion which it operates in itself requires a real effort at establishing the facts. On the other hand, the results of the selective examinations for teaching jobs, while they too need to be subjected to analysis, provide some extremely cruel 'facts': since 1974, when the Capès and agrégation in philosophy became mixed, the number of women who pass has been very small. The anti-feminists have a field day proclaiming that, now that the examinations are mixed, one can see what should have been clear all along - namely the distinct inferiority of women compared to their masculine

counterparts.

Even if one tries, as some do, to explain this theoretical inferiority either in material terms (a poor female candidate has a double job, her phallocrat of a husband or lover letting her deal with all the domestic chores) or, (quite unacceptable) in terms of some neuro-endocrinological fantasy, the disparity between the results of the men and the women remains a problem. I will not cite the evidence of teachers who prepare candidates for these examinations, teachers who never during the year of preparation have occasion to recognise the so-called inequality of 'standards', and who are always surprised by the results; this kind of evidence would surely not be considered proof. I shall just refer to the report on the agrégation of 1971. That year the exam was not mixed, and the minister had designated two sets of teaching posts, one for men, the other for women; but the two juries had amalgamated so that through an interchange of posts there was in fact only one jury. To its credit, this jury noted so great a disparity in favour of the women between the 'standard' of the men and women at the bottom of the lists, that they thought it their duty to take some posts from the men to award them to the women. That was in 1971. In 1974, for the first time, the examination was mixed, and the proportion of women absurdly low. What hormonal (or conjugal) change had occurred during these three years? Has the education of girls born after 1950 been so different from that of girls born immediately after the war? I suspect that any explanation one might seek in the candidates themselves will be completely unsatisfactory. It would be equally implausible to try to explain the present disparity in terms of the jury's (more or less unconscious) archaic anti-feminist prejudices: for it would be a mystery how the jury of 1971 could have escaped the effects of this phallocratic unconscious. I prefer to say that the historical and social context has altered slightly in three years, and that this alteration has reinforced a virilophile preference (which in 1971 had reached exhaustion point). A jury member is first and foremost a social agent like everybody else: he fulfils historical options which may well escape his conscious mind. It is not a question then of making out a case of intentions against people, but of trying to point out in what circumstances anti-feminism can reflower. So what did happen between 1971 and 1974? Unless I am mistaken, the number of posts available followed a rising curve until 1971. I wonder (perhaps this kind of hypothesis will make historians smile) whether those mini-periods which serve to instal a belief in the positivity of the time do not create a slight euphoria of the future which makes historical agents relatively progressive, at least in the domain where this belief can develop. And whether, on the other hand, periods of regression, of threats of dislocation, do not make social agents (in positions of power) more reactionary, more fiercely hostile to all openings towards the new, more anxious to protect a tradition with all the exclusivities it comprises. A strange idea perhaps, but were there ever as many discourses against everything philosophically or pedagogically modern as since the teaching of philosophy has been explicitly threatened? 'Go back to cours magistrales (lectures), have the courage to speak with authority, and above all do not talk of Freud.' This is the kind of conservative directive that we now increasingly receive. The gap between philosophical



work and university power did not exist, at least in this form, ten years ago: Georges Canguilhem, the general inspector and president of the agrégation jury, concretely backed the research of Lacan and Foucault. Today, however, there is a dream of returning to a golden age (the age of Alain?) expressed both from a theoretical point of view (Descartes rather than Freud) and from a pedagogical one (be magisterial). In such a situation anti-feminism has a twofold position: if philosophy teachers are to have more authority than they used to, obviously men will inspire more confidence than women. Moreover, the papers and orals of agrégation candidates identify themselves as masculine by their authoritative tone. This tallies with a general desire (not peculiar to philosophy) to defeminise education. And then philosophical anti-feminism is linked, as I have tried to show, to philosophy's claim to present itself as a form of knowledge which places its holder in a position of power. So it is not surprising that the return to philosophical dogmatism (and any anxious return to a former position is a kind of dogmatism) should accompany an anti-feminist wave. Certain questions about philosophy's status, about the gaps in philosophy caused by a certain kind of modernity, are locked away, and at the same time, the feminine is foreclosed in femininity. Moreover, books like *L'Ange* or *La Cuisinière et le Mangeur d'homme* today help to make women cooperate with this movement against them.

Let us be fair: these virilophile preferences do not themselves explain the change. The 1971 candidates had taken an 'ancien regime' degree (*licence*), a standard degree, the same for everyone. The 1974 candidates took a degree based on 'options' (*unités de valeur*). The second system leaves the 'choice' to the students; above all it gives free rein to self-evaluation at the point of choosing options. As such it constitutes an underhand form of social and sexual selection. I should like to see statistics on men's and women's choices. I would assume that they are different, and that the women tend to choose the options which are considered easy, whilst the men opt for the 'noble' ones, that is to say those which are 'difficult' and 'taxing'. For the men expect to be more capable, whilst the women underestimate their capacities.

Nonetheless we can be fair without being taken in: it is above all in written exams that women are eliminated. Since there are no little pink or blue stickers stuck on the papers to compensate for anonymity, some people might argue that it is impossible for sexist preferences to express themselves. But anyone who has corrected student papers will know that it is possible to distinguish two types of philosophical writing, masculine and feminine, and that these two types usually correspond to the sex of the candidate. Briefly, let us say that a paper can be identified as masculine by its authoritative tone, by the way interpretation dominates over receptivity to the text, resulting in a decisive and profound reading or in fantastic misinterpretation. Women, however, are all receptivity, and their papers are characterised by a kind of polite respect for the structure of the discourse of the other (this is called 'acuteness in detailed commentary but lack of overview'), by a great timidity (it is as though they left it to the text to explain itself), and also by a talent for what one might call the 'flattering comparison'. A particular passage in Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* may remind them of a letter in the *Nouvelle Héloïse*. A rather curious form of recall.

It is like a salon where a guest alludes to one of his claims to fame: the good hostess picks up the allusion immediately and recalls it in a few flattering terms, so offering the guest the pleasure of feeling he is being asked about himself. Men treat the text familiarly and knock it around happily; women treat it with a politeness for which girls' education has its share of responsibility. If the timidity and the desire to flatter are not too strong, this form of reading can, I think, produce great successes, a distanced kind of reading which enables one to see what is implicit in the text or to pick out the 'gaps' in a theorization. The question is whether it's because this kind of reading is not highly valued that the women fail, or whether it's not highly valued just because it's evidently feminine. I prefer the second hypothesis, and would add that the feminine is excluded because it is associated with the idea of lack of authority. In any case if a text is immediately identifiable as masculine or feminine, the anonymity is a mere joke. And this identification is in danger of being the more efficient for not always being conscious.

## Vestals and after

I would have liked to consider women's relationship to philosophical writing, and how people respond to philosophical books of the dozen or so women who have succeeded in getting their work published. But there isn't enough space, so I will confine myself to one point: There is one area where women today have completely free access, that of classic works of the history of philosophy. No-one considers studies by Marie Delcourt, Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, or Cornelia de Vogel as 'women's books' to be read with indulgence and condescension. Is this because these women impose on themselves 'the austere necessity of a discipline', so finding the 'third factor' on which they depend in order to direct the desire to philosophise towards the theoretical field? How is one to interpret the fact that our elders succeeded in getting themselves respected and recognised for commentaries or editions, whilst none of them produced such texts as *The Phenomenology of Perception* or the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*? That women should be admitted to the commemorative history of philosophy seems to me to be primarily a reflection of what is generally held to constitute a commentary. Who better than a woman to show fidelity, respect, and remembrance? A woman can be trusted to perpetuate the words of the Great Discourse: she will add none of her own. Everyone knows that the more of a philosopher one is, the more distorted one's reading of other philosophers. Think of Leibniz's reading of Malebranche, or Hegel's reading of Kant! They cannot respect the thought of the other: they are too engrossed in their own. Quite unscrupulously, they turn everything upside down, manhandle the texts, and make them say what they want them to say. Of course we should not criticise them for this; their incomprehension is a measure of their originality. If Hegel tortures Kantianism this is to his credit! For he is Hegel - a new strength which takes hold of broken texts to use them for his own ends. On the other hand, faithful commentary is reserved for those without any ends or thoughts of their own. Nietzsche said that a scientist's objectivity indicated his lack of instinct. How could a woman mishandle a text, or violate a discourse? The vestal of a discourse which time threatens to eclipse, the nurse of dismembered texts, the healer of works battered by false editions, the housewife whom one hopes will dust off the

grey film that successive readings have left on the fine object, she takes on the upkeep of the monuments, the forms which the mind has deserted. A god's priestess, dedicated to a great dead man. This phantasmagoria of the commentary has to some extent enabled women to find a place for themselves in philosophical work. A minor one, however: as in cooking, so in commentary - the high-class works are always reserved for a Hyppolite or a Bouse. It is true that Hyppolite didn't confine himself to 'explaining' Hegel. But from Hipparchia to the female historians of philosophy, there has been little progress in emancipation. At the moment all of us remain more or less imprisoned in this phantasmagoria of the commentary - the commentary which is trapped between the alternatives of violation and fidelity. When what bears the name of 'commentary' has been decoded, and the phantasmagorical representation of the activity has been dismantled, it will perhaps be possible to stop assigning such a 'subordinate' position to women in the distribution of theoretical tasks.

Whether forbidden to enter the area of philosophising, or 'benefitting' from a more or less cunning permissiveness, women have not yet won the battle that would give them a right to philosophy. For the moment it is important to know against whom - and with whom - this struggle can be fought. We must test out the following two propositions:

(1) Is it possible to make philosophy, or philosophical work, abandon its desire to be a theory which leaves no room for lack of knowledge, or to make it accept its incompleteness, and produce a non-hegemonic rationalism, so that philosophy no longer needs a defence mechanism involving the exclusion of women - and children? Alain Delorme's account of an experiment in philosophical teaching to 12-year-olds could well be leading in the same direction. Two developments, which are clearly interdependent, can be identified in his account: a proof of children's capacity to philosophise, and an idea of an unfinished philosophical discourse, never closed, and never concluded, and hence the abandonment of any totalising aim. It may be that only a form of philosophy that no longer considers its incompleteness a tragedy would be able to avoid projecting a theoretical incapacity onto children, women ... or the pre-socratics. This hypothesis is certainly too schematic to be accepted as it stands; but it is important to work on it.

(2) Is it possible to transform the relationship of individuals in this enterprise? For, until today, the subject of philosophical research has presented himself as the individual person, whether Aristotle, Spinoza or Hegel. And philosophical didactics also works between two personal poles, the master 'who knows' and the pupil 'who does not yet know'. This connection between the subject of philosophical knowledge and the individual person (a highly complex association, for the idea of a bearer of philosophical knowledge has contributed to the historical production of the idea of person) has numerous theoretical and pedagogical effects. Since at this point my ideas get muddled, I open a work by Hegel or Leibniz. And I catch myself thinking: 'what a cheek all the same! You must have an incredible nerve to claim intellectual mastery of all that is in heaven and earth - and in human practice. A woman would never dare.' But this nerve, if it has strongly masculine connotations, is even more marked by a necessity: since the subject of knowledge is the person, what 'I know' (or claim to know) gets confused with what 'is known'

indeed with what it is possible to know. The metaphysical (and logocentric) nerve of such and such a 'great philosopher' is what supports the idea of the existence of a form of knowledge. If the philosopher goes away, then there will be no one left to know, and there will be no more knowledge. But if the subject of the enterprise is no longer a person, or, better still, if each person involved in the enterprise is no longer in the position of being the subject of the enterprise but in that of being a worker, engaged in an enterprise which is seen from the outset as collective, it seems to me that the relationship to knowledge - and to gaps in knowledge - can be transformed. Here again, it is hard to describe the revolution that would be effected by a collective form of philosophical work and by a recognition of the fact that, in any case, the enterprise cannot be reduced to personal initiatives. Equally confused, I now open Pascal. And I suddenly see why, however foreign the religious concepts of this work are to me, I feel more 'at home' in the *Pensées* than in any of the other classic texts. It is because the religious perspective sketches this penumbra of lack of knowledge (a penumbra which has nothing to do with the limits of reason), which metaphysics has denied. Here is a form of writing which does not claim to reconstruct and explain everything, which slides along the verge of the unthought and develops only by grafting itself onto another speech and is willing to be its tributary. It may be said that it is scandalous to envisage 'a different form of writing' for the future (one in which women will be able to be re-integrated) in a work that wraps up its meanderings and 'blanks' in dogma and mystery. But replace obedience to these dogmas (or to another discourse already commenced) by the recognition that 'I do not do everything on my own', that I am a tributary to a collective discourse and knowledge, which have done more towards producing me than I shall contribute in continuing to produce them; and replace the mystery with a recognition of the necessarily incomplete character of all theorisation. What will we have then, if not today's only correct representation of the relationship between the subject and knowledge? - and also the only psycho-theoretical attitude which makes collective work possible and necessary - a 'collectivity' which, obviously, transcends the 'group' of people working together. The refusal to lay claim to an inaugural discourse, such as one finds in Foucault's *L'ordre du discours*, could serve to pinpoint the position that is trying to emerge today, and if the reference to Pascal bothers readers, let them replace it by a reference to Foucault - though this is a more dangerous reference, since it threatens to re-organise the transference which we ought to be denouncing.

The belief which has emerged from my still very recent experience of collective work is that the future of women's struggle for access to the philosophical will be played out somewhere in the field of plural work. More especially as the work groups are likely to acquire a structuring power (of acting as a 'third factor' and as the system of restraint needed to counteract the discouragement resulting from negative narcissism) analogous or equivalent to that of the institution: they enable one to avoid both the Heloise position (probably through a transference onto a peer group) and its equally undesirable opposite, which is the over-investment of the desire to philosophise in the 'academic' or the 'institutional'. It is in this kind of practice that I have, to some extent, experienced a relationship to a new logos, a logos where one can reintroduce a relationship to the unthought.

(translated by Debbie Pope)