

## — Prelude —

I would probably not have embarked on such a difficult subject if I had not been compelled to do so by the whole logic of my research. I have always been astonished by what might be called the *paradox of doxa* – the fact that the order of the world as we find it, with its one-way streets and its no-entry signs, whether literal or figurative, its obligations and its penalties, is broadly respected; that there are not more transgressions and subversions, contraventions and ‘follies’ (just think of the extraordinary concordance of thousands of dispositions – or wills – implied in five minutes’ movement of traffic around the Place de la Bastille or Place de la Concorde . . .); or, still more surprisingly, that the established order, with its relations of domination, its rights and prerogatives, privileges and injustices, ultimately perpetuates itself so easily, apart from a few historical accidents, and that the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural. And I have also seen masculine domination, and the way it is imposed and suffered, as the prime example of this paradoxical submission, an effect of what I call symbolic violence, a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims,

---

I am not sure whether giving thanks by name would be a blessing or a curse for those concerned, and so I shall simply record here my deep gratitude to all those (men and especially women) who have supplied me with testimonies, documents, references and ideas; and my hope that, especially in its effects, this work will be worthy of the confidence and expectations they have placed in it.

exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, mis-recognition), recognition, or even feeling. This extraordinarily ordinary social relation thus offers a privileged opportunity to grasp the logic of the domination exerted in the name of a symbolic principle known and recognized both by the dominant and by the dominated – a language (or a pronunciation), a lifestyle (or a way of thinking, speaking and acting) – and, more generally, a distinctive property, whether emblem or stigma, the symbolically most powerful of which is that perfectly arbitrary and non-predictive bodily property, skin colour.

It is clear that in these areas one must above all restore the paradoxical character of *doxa* while at the same time dismantling the processes responsible for this transformation of history into nature, of cultural arbitrariness into the *natural*. And to do so, one has to adopt the point of view on our own world and our own vision of the world which is that of the anthropologist, capable of showing that the principle of division (*nomos*) which founds the difference between male and female as we (mis)recognize it is simultaneously arbitrary, contingent, and also socio-logically necessary. It is no accident that, when she wants to suspend what she magnificently calls 'the hypnotic power of domination', Virginia Woolf resorts to an ethnographic analogy, genetically relating the segregation of women to the rituals of an archaic society: 'Inevitably, we look upon societies as conspiracies that sink the private brother, whom many of us have reason to respect, and inflate in his stead a monstrous male, loud of voice, hard of fist, childishly intent upon scoring the floor of the earth with chalk marks, within whose mystic boundaries human beings are penned, rigidly, separately, artificially; where, daubed red and gold, decorated like a savage with feathers, he goes through mystic rites and enjoys the dubious pleasures of power and dominion while we, "his" women, are locked in the private house without share in the many societies of which his society is composed.'<sup>1</sup> 'Mystic boundaries', 'mystic rites' – this language, the language of the magical transformation and symbolic conversion produced by ritual consecration, the basis of a new birth, is an invitation to

1 V. Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: Hogarth Press, 1939), p. 121.

orient research towards an approach capable of grasping the specifically symbolic dimension of male domination.

And so one has to seek in a materialist analysis of the economy of symbolic goods the means of escaping from the ruinous choice between the 'material' and the 'spiritual' or 'ideal' [*idéel*] (perpetuated nowadays in the opposition between would-be 'materialist' studies which explain the asymmetry between the sexes in terms of the conditions of production and what are called 'symbolic' studies, which are often remarkable, but partial). But, before that, only a very particular use of ethnology can make it possible to carry out the project, suggested by Virginia Woolf, of scientifically objectifying the truly mystical operation of which the division between the sexes as we know it is the product, or, in other words, of treating the objective analysis of a society organized through and through according to the androcentric principle (the Kabyle tradition) as an objective archaeology of our unconscious, in other words as the instrument of a genuine socioanalysis.<sup>2</sup>

This detour through an exotic tradition is indispensable in order to break the relationship of deceptive familiarity that binds us to our own tradition. The biological appearances and the very real effects that have been produced in bodies and minds by a long collective labour of socialization of the biological and biologicization of the social combine to reverse the relationship between causes and effects and to make a naturalized social construction ('genders' as sexually characterized habitus) appear as the grounding in nature of the arbitrary division which underlies both reality and the representation of reality and which sometimes imposes itself even on scientific research.<sup>3</sup>

2 If only to show that my present intention does not stem from a recent conversion, I refer the reader to the pages of a book, written two decades ago, in which I insisted that, when applied to the sexual division of the world, ethnology can 'become a particularly powerful form of socio-analysis' (P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990, p. 14; French edition published in 1980).

3 Thus it is not uncommon for example for psychologists to take over the common vision of the sexes as radically separate sets, without intersections, and to ignore the degree of *overlap* between the distributions of male and female performances and the differences (of magnitude) between the differences observed in various domains (from sexual anatomy to intelligence). Or, worse, they often let themselves be guided, in *constructing* and *describing* their object, by the principles of vision and division embedded in ordinary

But does not this quasi-analytical use of ethnography to historicize and so denaturalize what seems most natural in the social order, the division between the sexes, run the risk of bringing to light constants and invariants – which are the very basis of its socioanalytical efficacy – and thereby of ratifying and eternalizing a conservative representation of the relationship between the sexes, the very one which is condensed in the myth of the ‘eternal feminine’? Here one has to confront a new paradox, entailing a complete revolution in the approach to what researchers have aimed to study under the rubric of ‘women’s history’: do not the invariants which, beyond all the visible changes in the position of women, are observed in the relations of domination between the sexes require one to take as one’s privileged object the historical mechanisms and institutions which, in the course of history, have continuously abstracted these invariants from history?

This cognitive revolution would inevitably have consequences at the level of practice, and, in particular, in the formulation of strategies aimed at transforming the present state of the material and symbolic power relation between the sexes. If it is true that the principle of the perpetuation of this relationship of domination does not truly reside (or, at least, not principally) in one of the most visible sites in which it is exercised – in other words, within the domestic sphere, on which some feminist debate has concentrated its attention – but in agencies such as the school or the state, sites where principles of domination that go on to be exercised within even the most private universe are developed and imposed, then a vast field of action is opened up for feminist struggles, which are thus called upon to take a distinctive and decisive place within political struggles against *all* forms of domination.

language, either seeking to measure differences identified in that language – such as the more ‘aggressive’ nature of men or the more ‘timid’ nature of women – or using ordinary, and therefore value-laden, terms to describe those differences. See, as examples among many others, J. A. Sherman, *Sex-Related Cognitive Differences: An Essay on Theory and Evidence* (Springfield, Ill.: Thomas, 1978); M. B. Parlee, ‘Psychology: review essay’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1 (1975), pp. 119–38 – especially on the balance-sheet of the mental and behavioural differences between the sexes drawn up by J. E. Garai and A. Scheinfeld in 1968; M. B. Parlee, ‘The Premenstrual Syndrome’, *Psychological Bulletin*, 80 (1973), pp. 454–65.

# — 1 —

## A magnified image

Being included, as man or woman, in the object that we are trying to comprehend, we have embodied the historical structures of the masculine order in the form of unconscious schemes of perception and appreciation. When we try to understand masculine domination we are therefore likely to resort to modes of thought that are the product of domination. Our only hope of breaking out of that circle lies in finding a practical strategy for objectifying the subject of scientific objectification. This strategy, the one I shall adopt here, consists in transforming an exercise of transcendental reflection aimed at exploring the ‘categories of understanding’ – or, in Durkheim’s terms, the ‘forms of classification’ with which we construct the world (but which, as products of that world, are largely attuned to it, so that they remain unnoticed) – into a kind of laboratory experiment. This will consist in treating ethnographic analysis of the objective structures and cognitive forms of a particular historical society, at once exotic and very close to us, both strange and familiar, that of the Berbers of Kabylia, as the instrument of a socioanalysis of the androcentric unconscious that is capable of objectifying the categories of that unconscious.<sup>1</sup>

1 I would probably not have been able to appreciate the analysis of masculine perception contained in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (which I discuss below) if I had not reread it with an eye informed by the Kabyle vision (V. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. 20).