

exposed to domineering rivalry, the loving subject can obtain recognition only from another subject, but one which, like himself or herself, abdicates the intention of dominating. He or she freely hands his or her freedom to a master who in turn hands over his or her own, coinciding with him or her in an act of free alienation that is indefinitely asserted (through the non-redundant repetition of 'I love you'). He or she has the experience of being a quasi-divine creator who makes, *ex nihilo*, the beloved, through the power that she or he grants him or her (in particular the power of *naming*, manifested in all the unique and secret names that lovers give each other and which, as in an initiatory ritual, mark a new birth, an absolute first beginning, a change of ontological status); but a creator who, in return and simultaneously, unlike an egocentric and dominating Pygmalion, accepts to be the creature of his creature.

Mutual recognition, exchange of justifications for existing and reasons for being, mutual testimony of *trust* . . . so many signs of the perfect reciprocity through which the circle in which the loving dyad encloses itself, as an elementary social unit, indivisible and charged with a powerful symbolic autarky, becomes endowed with the power to rival successfully all the consecrations that are ordinarily asked of the institutions and rites of 'Society', the secular substitute for God.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ On the theologico-political function of institution and its rites, see P. Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), pp. 237–45.

— Conclusion —

When a scientific analysis of a form of domination is made publicly available, this necessarily has social effects, but they may run in two opposing directions: it may either symbolically reinforce domination, when its findings seem to confirm or intersect with the dominant discourse (whose negative verdicts often take the appearance of a pure constative recording), or help to neutralize it, rather like the revelation of a state secret, by favouring the mobilization of the victims. It is therefore exposed to all kinds of misunderstandings, easier to foresee than to dispel in advance.

Faced with such difficult conditions of reception, the analyst might be tempted simply to invoke his or her good faith if he or she did not know that, in such sensitive matters, good faith is not enough; nor, for that matter, is the activist's conviction which inspires many writings on the condition of women (and which generates interest in objects previously ignored or neglected). For one cannot overestimate the risks that arise for any scientific project that allows its object to be imposed on it by external considerations, however noble and generous they may be. 'Good causes' are no substitute for epistemological justifications and do not allow one to dispense with the reflexive analysis which sometimes leads to the discovery that the propriety of 'good intentions' does not necessarily exclude an interest in the profits associated with fighting a 'good fight' (which does not all imply that, as I have sometimes been claimed to

say, 'every activist project is non-scientific'). While there is no question of trying to rid science of the individual or collective motivation aroused by the existence of political and intellectual mobilization, in the name of some kind of utopian *Wertfreiheit* ('refusal of value judgements'), the fact remains that the best of political movements will inevitably produce bad science, and, in the long run, bad politics, if it is not able to convert its subversive dispositions into a critical inspiration – critical firstly of itself.

It is understandable that, in order to avoid *ratifying* the real under the appearance of scientifically recording it, one may be led to pass over in silence the most visibly negative effects of domination and exploitation. Thus some authors, out of a concern to rehabilitate or a fear of giving weapons to the racism which precisely inscribes these cultural differences in the nature of the dominated and which 'blames the victims' by bracketing off the conditions of existence of which they are the product, take the more or less conscious decision to speak of 'popular culture' or, in connection with blacks in the United States, the 'culture of poverty'; while others, like some contemporary feminists, prefer to 'avoid the analysis of submission, for fear that admitting women's participation in the relation of domination might amount to shifting the burden of responsibility from men to women'.¹ In fact, against the apparently generous temptation, to which so many subversive movements have succumbed, to put forward an idealized representation of the oppressed and the stigmatized in the name of fellow-feeling, solidarity or moral indignation, and to pass over in silence the very effects of domination, especially the most negative ones, one has to take the risk of seeming to justify the established order by bringing to light the properties through which the dominated (women, manual workers, etc.), as domination has made them, may contribute to their own domination.² Appearances – I have said

1 J. Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), p. 9.

2 Similarly, to bring to light the effects that masculine domination exerts on the habitus of men does not mean, as some would like to think, trying to exculpate men. It means showing that the effort to liberate women from domination, i.e. from the objective and embodied dispositions that impose it on them, must be accompanied by an effort to free men from the same structures which lead them to help to impose it.

this many times – always support appearance, and the enterprise of unveiling is likely to incur both the indignant condemnations of conservatism and the pharisaical denunciations of revolutionarism. Thus, Catharine MacKinnon, who has good reason to be particularly lucid about the probable effects of lucidity, regrets that when she endeavours to describe the true nature of relations between the sexes, she is immediately accused of being 'condescending to women' when she is simply showing 'how women are condescended to'.³ Such an accusation is even more likely in the case of a man, who clearly has no answer to those who invoke the absolute authority of their 'experience' of femininity to condemn without appeal any attempt to conceptualize the object of which they so easily claim a monopoly.⁴

This having been said, the prejudice often encountered by men's writing on sexual difference is not always without foundation. This is not only because the analyst, who is caught up in what he thinks he is comprehending, may, unwittingly following justificatory intentions, present the presuppositions that he has himself brought in as revelations as to the presuppositions of the agents. It is also, and more importantly, because, dealing with an institution that has been inscribed for millennia in the objectivity of social structures and in the subjectivity of cognitive structures, and therefore having at his disposal in order to conceptualize the opposition between male and female only a mind structured according to that opposition, he is liable to use as instruments of knowledge schemes of perception and thought which he ought to treat as objects of knowledge. And so even the most alert of analysts (Kant, Sartre, Freud, even Lacan...) is liable to draw unwittingly on an

3 C. A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

4 To claim the monopoly of any object (if only by simple use of the 'we' that is common in some feminist writings), on the grounds of the cognitive privilege that is presumed to be granted by the mere fact of being both subject and object, and more precisely of having first-person experience of the singular form of the human condition that is to be scientifically analysed, is to bring into the scientific field the political defence of particularisms which justifies *a priori* suspicion, and to call into question the universalism which, especially through the right of access of all to all objects, is one of the foundations of the Republic of science.

unthought unconscious for the instruments of thought that he uses in order to think the unconscious.

And so, if, after much hesitation and with much trepidation, I have ventured on to an extremely difficult terrain, currently occupied almost exclusively by women, it is because I felt that the relationship of sympathetic externality in which I found myself might enable me to produce, with the aid of the immense body of work encouraged by the feminist movement, and also of the findings of my own research on the social causes and effects of symbolic domination, an analysis capable of giving a different orientation both to research on the condition of women, or, to speak more relationally, on relations between the sexes, and to the action aimed at changing those relations. For it seems to me that, while the domestic unit is one of the sites where masculine domination manifests itself most indisputably and most visibly (and not only through recourse to physical violence), the principle of the perpetuation of the material and symbolic power relations exerted there is largely situated outside that unit, in agencies such as the church, the educational system or the state, and in their strictly political actions, whether overt or hidden, official or unofficial (to be persuaded of this, one only has to observe the reactions and resistance to the current proposal for a 'contrat d'union civile'⁵).

Thus, while the feminist movement has made a major contribution to a considerable enlargement of the area of what is political or can be politicized, by making it possible to discuss or challenge politically objects and preoccupations excluded or ignored by the political tradition because they seem to belong to the private domain, it should not let itself be led to exclude, on the grounds that they belong to the most traditional logic of politics, struggles over agencies which, through their negative and (because they are attuned to the structures of the male and also female unconscious) largely invisible action, make a significant contribution to the perpetuation of the social relations of domination between the sexes. But equally it should not let itself be confined within forms of struggles that are

⁵ A 'contract of civil union' giving homosexual couples a status analogous to that of a married heterosexual couple (*trans.*).

conventionally labelled feminist, such as the demand for parity between men and women within political organizations. While they have the merit of showing that the theoretical universalism flaunted by constitutional law is not always as universal as it seems – especially in as much as it recognizes only abstract individuals, devoid of social qualities – these struggles are liable to reinforce the effects of another form of fictitious universalism, by favouring firstly women drawn from the same regions of social space as the men who currently occupy the dominant positions.

Only political action that really takes account of all the effects of domination that are exerted through the objective complicity between the structures embodied in both women and men and the structures of the major institutions through which not only the masculine order but the whole social order is enacted and reproduced (starting with the state, structured around the opposition between its male 'right hand' and its female 'left hand', and the educational system, responsible for the effective reproduction of all the principles of vision and division, and itself organized around analogous oppositions) will be able, no doubt in the long term and with the aid of the contradictions inherent in the various mechanisms or institutions concerned, to contribute to the progressive withering away of masculine domination.