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with its objectifying analysis, has produced both disenchantment and mastery over the world, has also carried a "naturalistic" interpretation of the human being, a loss of emotional and practical richness as well as a loss of the personal and unavoidable orientation in the world. Here the limits of the power of objectification become evident, as does the necessity of integrating the rights of "thought" with those of "feeling" and "will."

With these three psychic functions, Yorck tries a physiognomic reading of the main historical epochs of Western culture: the Greek epoch, Christianity, and the epoch of modernity, rebuilding spaces and figures of Western philosophical thought, using a sort of cross-bred strategy which allows the rediscovery, through some emblematic figures, of the scenarios and aspirations of an entire epoch, and of a specific constellation of life: "I believe that humans, and not ideas without hands or feet, move history."

We are not able to review here the entire richness of the analyses, themes and suggestions contained in this dense, yet agile study. We have good reason to recognize that we seldom come across books of philosophy so capable of interpreting a work, reopening it to new possibilities of thinking, and practicing a robust and non-ephemeral force of attraction.

FLAVIA STARA

Sexual Difference

By the Milan Women's Collective Bookstore. Translated by Teresa de Lauretis and Patrizia Cicogna. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Sexual Difference is the translation of *Non credere di avere dei diritti*, a 1987 book by the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective (hereafter MWBC). Implied by the difference in titles (literally, *non credere di avere dei diritti* means "don't think you have any rights"), the translation is not a transparent English copy of the original, but a reading of it, and a self-conscious one at that. A triple level of textuality is thus at work in *Sexual Difference*: the Italian original, its translation and de Lauretis's introduction. Furthermore, this triple-layered text has been 'viewed' and is being reviewed by an Italian man employed as a cultural worker in one of the departments of Italian in a North American college. Confessing to my failure to articulate properly these levels all at once, I have opted here for multiple takes. I will summarize (read and rewrite in fast motion) *Non credere di avere dei diritti*, comment on its translation, map my appropriation (as an effect of a text that incites me to keep my maleness in sight) and, finally, report on de Lauretis's dialectical relationship with the original as evinced by her precious introduction. The Italian title *Non credere di avere dei diritti* (after a quote from Simone Weil) is partially contradicted by the subtitle, *La generazione della libertà femminile nell' idea e nelle vicende di un gruppo di donne* (the generation of female free-

dom in the idea and vicissitudes of a group of women). Title and subtitle create a sort of chiasmic structure where the absence of rights becomes a source of freedom, which is in turn threatened by the absence of rights in place to guarantee its continuity. The authors do not mean legal, occupational and family rights—emancipation and equality—but, rather, the right to have a symbolic sphere tailored to your sexed subjectivity, something we (men) have, for example in the primacy our culture assigns to the father-son relationship. The book thus relates the intellectual and political vicissitudes of a group of Italian feminists (the MWBC) engaged in focusing on and seeking a remedy for the lack of a specifically female symbolic sphere.

The first chapter narrates the birth of feminist antagonism in the late 1960s (e.g., the intriguing work of Carla Lonzi) and the three “practices” which issued from the need to found, substantiate and implement “the idea of a female mediation between oneself and the world” (42): the *autocoscienza* groups, “a simple, ingenious practice” which “contributed in a decisive way to make feminism a mass movement” (40); the practice of the unconscious, an outcome of the collaboration with the group *Politique et psychanalyse*, which “focused on the female experience as the experience of a real body in lively, perceptual contact with the real world, but almost [al]together lacking the means of symbolic reproduction of itself in relation to that world” (52); and “the practice of doing among women” (“la pratica del fare fra donne”), a concrete “giv-

ing social form to and transforming into political content, the very aspect of human female experience that women themselves found difficult to put into words.” (58)

The second chapter, written by the lawyers among the MWBC, analyzes two complementary positions on the subject of abortion and rape laws, positions which might reductively be described as two variants of the old reformism/ extremism dilemma within antagonistic thought: on the one hand the desire for reforms to be carried out within the system and on the other a kind of purist persistence in regarding the existing institutions as genetically incapable of doing anything good for those who situate themselves (and are situated) outside the perimeters (and parameters) of those institutions, whereas the ‘reformist’ tendency “considered women an oppressed social group and, as such, homogeneous and needing protection”, the intransigent wing (represented, among others, by most of the MWBC) “considered women a different gender which was denied existence in the actual social system” (73) and thus saw it unfit to ask that very system for ameliorations.

The third chapter narrates the already-mentioned transition from the practice of the unconscious, hinging on self-awareness and speech, to the practice of doing among women which resulted in “setting up enterprises such as bookstores, libraries, small publishing houses and meeting places” (81). The Milan Women Bookstore was a social-symbolic practice founded within the scope of this political project, in 1975, away

from official ideologies. The theory behind this new stage was condensed in a two-page article published in *Sottosopra* no. 3, 1976 (an erratic, but crucial publication, *Sottosopra* was originally created in 1973 by various feminist groups in Milan and later transformed into one of the channels of the MWBC) and entitled "The Time, the Means and the Spaces". Mentioning the experiment of the MWBC, the authors of this document argue that "adequate times, means and spaces mean that situations must be created where women can be together to see, talk, listen, and relate to one another, and to all the others; it means involving the body and sexuality in these collective situations, in a collective space not regulated by male interests. In this space we assert our interests and engage dialectically with the reality we want to change." (84) Aimed at the creation of a female autonomy leading to "the joint transformation of the female body and the social body" (84), this strategy ensued in a series of important activities, such as the (by now famous) experiment of the "150-hour courses for women," adult education classes on women's issues planned and coordinated by cooperation between women trade unionists and feminist groups. This practice of doing led to the gradual focusing on the need for a symbolic sphere within which to couch a different production of meaning out of an embodied knowledge: "In the women's movement, the importance of the symbolic was known from the start. But there was no idea of doing political work on the symbolic" (106), a political work that consisted "of dividing in two the

unity by which the functioning of the social body is represented, and thus showing its gendered (*sessuata*) nature" (107).

The fourth and last chapter relates the MWBC's original contribution to the politics of the symbolic and is in many ways the theoretical pivot of the book, for it elucidates the two main, controversial and complementary, points of a radically separatist social practice: gendered thinking (*ragionare sessuato*) about the world and the practice of entrustment (*affidamento*).

"Gendered thinking" represents an epistemological break, perhaps more violent than the English translation would let us suspect. As a point of fact, it may be helpful to keep the literal translation of *ragionare sessuato*, "sexed reasoning," in mind, for it is an explosive oxymoron, since, according to the authors of the book, reason (*ragione*) is constructed on the very erasure of sexual difference. Subsequently theorized by the work of Adriana Cavarero and the Diotima group, this "gendered thinking" aims to split the world in two by referring to sexual difference as the great repressed element of Western thought. "Gendered thinking" has the effect of bracketing the entire philosophical edifice by denouncing the pretense to neutrality and universality at work in the linguistic (the words *uomo*, *umanesimo*) and cognitive (the impartiality of the knowing subject) practices of patriarchal thought. "Sexual difference is an originary human difference. We must not enclose it in this or that meaning, but must accept it along with our being-body and render it significant:

an inexhaustible source of ever-new meanings" (125).

The practice of entrustment follows the splitting of the world in two sexes and founds the possibility of a female symbolic sphere by visualizing and creating the figure of a symbolic mother. Stemming from the acknowledgment of disparity among women (against the myth of equality) and conceived as a blow against the homogenizing, difference-effacing tendencies of late patriarchy, entrustment designates a social relationship in which a woman recognizes the superiority/authority of another woman and entrusts herself to her, as to a symbolic mother. "The introduction of the relation of entrustment into social relations, so that the female sex may find in itself the source of its value and its social measure, is a political project born from the knowledge of sexual difference. Its basis is the necessity of gendered (*sessuata*) mediation. Its reference point is the female human experience, its past history, its present needs." (121)

Seen in the context of the recent appearance of other works on Italian feminism, the translation of this bold and challenging contribution of Italian feminism is a political act in and of itself. More specifically, it testifies to what Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp, in their introduction to *Italian Feminist Thought. A Reader*, call "a change of climate, responding to the need to destabilize that binary logic which, challenged by contemporary philosophical thought and by feminist theory itself, has ironically crept in again" in the shape of a Franco-American dualism. Whereas the fem-

inist works in French and English have been canonized, "it is striking how quickly (...) the rest, the Italian included, has fallen victim to a kind of cultural imperialism." For years, Italianists in the United States had to live without the possibility of referring back to their own culture and language in the debate over feminist issues. Thus, on a most immediate level, the translation/publication of *Sexual Difference* almost transcends its content, for it will allow the departments of Women Studies to incorporate an Italian perspective and, concurrently, will give Italianists the chance to show a different image of Italy, to enhance their curricula and syllabi, to modify and disrupt a canon which, in the big sanctuaries of Italian studies, is slow in opening up. It is no accident that Teresa de Lauretis is not in Italian Studies.

I said "almost transcends its content" because the radical separatism advocated by the authors of *Sexual Difference* cannot be really transcended. This is obviously the opinion of the translators, who chose to emphasize the book's stance on the fundamental, and thus foundational, value of sex difference by changing the title of the book into, precisely, *Sexual Difference*. Aware that "the act of translation is often a rewriting of the original language" (21), de Lauretis and Cicogna have tried to facilitate the appropriation of the book by North American readers with a series of stylistic, syntactic and lexical choices. While agreeing on most of such choices (e.g. the translation of the word *femminile* with "female" in order to avoid the unwanted connotations of "feminine"), I am not total-

ly satisfied with the translation of *sessuato* with "gendered." If it is true that the word *genere* (gender) is not common Italian, it is equally true that *sessuato* carries a bio-essentialist connotation that "gender," by definition, avoids. Gender, as I understand it, refers more to the social construction of masculinity and femininity (maleness and femaleness), so that to say "gendered subject" is slightly different than saying *sogetto sessuato*.

In attempting to chart the philosophical and political impact of *Sexual Difference*, I must live and theorize a schizophrenic situation. On the one hand, this is a book that advocates a radical separatism on the part of women, and thus leaves me out. On the other, it is a book that powerfully criticizes a philosophical and political system, the demolition of which ranks high in the agenda of many radical men.

In addition to the fragility that I must feel as a man "reviewing" feminist issues, this book forces me, if I am to take its premise and conclusion seriously, to reconsider a series of assumptions, first of all that of Mankind. Since the word "man" contains the metonymic slippage whereby it signifies at once the masculine and the neuter, perhaps we (men) should start referring to ourselves as "males"—although "male" has its problems too, since it is seen as the "animal" counterpart of "man" and thus belongs to the same conceptual constellation. *Sexual Difference* makes me feel that my review ought to concentrate in mapping what I think we (males) might learn from it. For example whenever we (males) say "we," well, we (males) should stop

right there and make an effort to think of "we" as "men only," and of the vast, "dark continent" of women as involved in a different symbolic relationship with the world and in a separate production of reference and meaning. In other words, we (males) might learn from this book how to be honest about our partiality and situatedness, instead of speaking of and from universalist positions. In addition, we (males) might also learn about entrustment as a practice of admitting disparity without falling into a Darwinian competition. But, most of all, we (males) might learn how to question the foundations of Western philosophy. Of course, a deconstructive re-reading of Plato has been performed by Derrida and Co., but we (males) have missed the particular slant given to such re-reading by some Italian feminists (e.g., the Diotima group) that is, the foundational character of sexual difference. It may be that this idea turns out to be unsustainable. Still, we (males) ought to verify the extent to which it alters what we (males) have been assuming all along (the unity of thought in the name of Mankind). The best we (male academics) can do is to hand this problem to our students and propose it as one of the questions which the next generation will have to face. This would already be a significant step in Italian Studies: asking our students to invest their time and energy in thinking the question of sexual difference instead of asking them to spend mental energy remembering the names of the men to whom the two editions of Machiavelli's *The Prince* were dedicated (this is not a gratuitous exam-

ple: this very question was asked during a PhD oral exam at Harvard University in 1992).

On another level, my post-sixties radicalism rejoices at the revolutionary action performed by the idea of *ragionare sessuato*. At that level, I find that some of the MWBC's discursive moves remind me (physically, as I lived in Italy until 1976) of a form of antagonism which shaped the imagination of other collective movements in those days. The word *autonomia* and the fact that some of the articles appeared on *Lotta Continua* make me feel that in the wider social context, I can somewhat run along the lines of resistance practiced and theorized, or theorized and practiced, by the MWBC. The discursive strategies and practices of the MWBC are, then, those of a small antagonistic group that is anxious to assert, enhance and implement its difference from a uniformly-perceived system, establishment, totality. Their refusal to play the game, their desire not to participate and to isolate themselves, can certainly find responsive parallels in a situationist practice of dissent—not so much in its ludic aspect as in its theory of creating situations, psycho-geographies, in which to assert one's antagonistic subjectivity: a symbolic space of one's own.

De Lauretis's introduction appropriately contextualizes the book within the contemporary feminist debate, arguing that *Sexual Difference* "is not only a major theoretical text of Italian feminism but one which, in elaborating a critical theory of culture based on the practice of sexual difference, also reconstructs a history of feminism in Italy from the particular loca-

tion, the social and political situatedness, of its authors" (1). De Lauretis particularly emphasizes the idea of female genealogy, which "is not limited to literary figures but reaches into relationships between women in everyday life" (2), and points out that the MWBC's relationship with post-structuralism is mediated by Irigaray rather than Barthes. Most effectively, she then quotes Cavarero on the task to think sexual difference, "an arduous one because sexual difference lies precisely in the erasure on which Western philosophy has been founded and developed. To think sexual difference starting from the male universal is to think it as already thought, that is, to think it through the categories of a thought that is supported by the non-thinking of difference itself" (4). Last but not least, de Lauretis questions the book's silence on the issue of lesbianism, a silence which is, in turn, a figure of the general silence that enshrouds lesbian subjectivity and identity in Italy. Offering the reader a valuable reading of this silence, she points out how "the radically separatist theory of social practice" advocated by the book "does in fact articulate a position that, at least in the North American context, might be read as a lesbian feminist position" (17). Generously, De Lauretis ends her criticism of the MWBC's silence on lesbianism with a quote from a letter that Luisa Muraro, one of the authors of the book, wrote to her after reading her introduction:

From the way you speak of lesbianism, it almost seems as if you are making sexual choice a principle or a cause or a foundation of freedom. If that were what you

thought, I would say to you: no, the principle of female freedom is of a symbolic nature. It is not an actual behavior, however valid and precious such a behavior may be toward the empowering of women in society.

Finally, de Lauretis notes that the theory of social-symbolic practice espoused by the MWBC "makes little space for differences and divisions between—and especially within—women, and so tends to construct a view of the female subject that is still too closely modeled on the "monstrous" subject of philosophy and History" (18). But, she concludes, if the project of this feminist philosophy can be rightly criticized for its unquestioning acceptance of the classic, unified subject of philosophy, nevertheless the notion of essential and originary difference represents a point of consensus and a new starting point for feminist thought in Italy" (19).

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¹For example, Lucia Chiavola-Birnbaum, *Liberazione della donna: Feminism in Italy*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1986), and *Italian Feminist Thought. A Reader*, ed. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

²*Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, op. cit.

The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto.

by Valeria Finucci.

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992.

Finucci's book is concerned with modes by which the depiction of women-- or more precisely, of female subjectivities-- in canonical works of the Italian Renaissance is shaped by male writers and through the gaze of male characters. Contesting a strong critical tradition stemming from Burckhardt which locates protofeminist attitudes in Castiglione's *Il libro del cortigiano* and Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, Finucci argues that in both these works the representations of women actually legitimize patriarchal constructions of the female. Even militantly aggressive female figures are ultimately recuperated into the patriarchal economy and thereby serve to define that economy and the males within it. Thus there are no "female" subjectivities in Castiglione and Ariosto at all, only representations which function reflexively to validate male fantasies of their own sexual identity.

Finucci's discussion, rooted in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, proceeds from the post-structuralist assumption that subjectivity is the product of discourse. Although at times Finucci implies that it is language itself that denies the female any possibility of independent identity within the symbolic order, her real interest lies in specific discursive strategies to be found in Castiglione and Ariosto for contain-