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THE VIOLENCE OF RHETORIC

Considerations on Representation and Gender

Older women are more skeptical in their heart of hearts than any man; they believe in the superficiality of existence as in its essence, and all virtue and profundity is to them merely a way to cover up this "truth," a very welcome veil over a *puḍendum*—in other words, a matter of decency and shame, and nothing more!

—FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *The Gay Science*

Even the healthiest woman runs a zigzag course between sexual and individual life, stunting herself now as a person, now as a woman.

—LOU ANDREAS-SALOMÉ, *Zur Psychologie der Frau*

Woman's skepticism, Nietzsche suggests, comes from her disregard for truth. Truth does not concern her. Therefore, paradoxically, woman becomes the symbol of Truth, of that which constantly eludes man and must be won, which lures and resists, mocks and seduces, and will not be captured. This skepticism, this truth of nontruth, is the "affirmative woman" Nietzsche loved and was, Derrida suggests. It is the philosophical position Nietzsche himself occupies and speaks from—a position which Derrida locates in the terms of a rhetoric, "between the 'enigma of this solution' and the 'solution of this enigma'" (1976b, p. 51).¹ The place from where he speaks, the locus of his enunciation, is a constantly shifting place

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within discourse (philosophy), a rhetorical function and construct; and a construct which—call it *différance*, displacement, negativity, internal exclusion, or marginality—has become perhaps the foremost rhetorical trope of recent philosophical speculation. However, in speaking from that place, from the position of woman, Nietzsche need not “stunt” himself “now as a person, now as a woman,” as his contemporary and sometime friend Lou Andreas-Salomé admittedly did.² The difference between them, if I may put it bluntly, is not *différance* but gender.

If Nietzsche and Derrida can occupy and speak from the position of woman, it is because that position is vacant and, what is more, cannot be claimed by women. To anticipate a point that will be elaborated later on, I simply want to suggest that while the question of woman for the male philosophers is a question of style (of discourse, language, writing—of philosophy), for Salomé, as in most present-day feminist thinking, it is a question of gender—of the social construction of “woman” and “man,” and the semiotic production of subjectivity. And whereas both style and gender have much to do with rhetoric, the latter (as I use the term and will attempt to articulate it) has also much to do with history, practices, and the imbrication of meaning with experience; in other words, with the mutually constitutive effects in semiosis of what Peirce called the “outer world” of social reality and the “inner world” of subjectivity.

With that in mind, let me then step into the role of Nietzsche’s older woman and cast my considerations on the semiotic production of gender between the rhetoric of violence and the violence of rhetoric.

The very notion of a “rhetoric of violence,” from which this volume departs, presupposes that some order of language, some kind of discursive representation is at work not only in the concept “violence” but in the social practices of violence as well. The (semiotic) relation of the social to the discursive is thus posed from the start. But once that relation is instated, once a connection is assumed between violence and rhetoric, the two terms begin to slide, and, soon enough, the connection will appear to be reversible. From the Foucauldian notion of a rhetoric of violence, an order of language which speaks violence—names certain behaviors and events as violent, but not others, and constructs objects and subjects of violence, and hence violence as a social fact—it is easy to slide into the reverse notion of a language which, itself, produces violence. But if violence is in language, before if not regardless of its concrete occurrences in the world, then there is also a violence of rhetoric, or what Derrida has called “the violence of the letter” (1976a, pp. 101–140).

I will contend that both views of the relation between rhetoric and violence contain and indeed depend on the same representation of sexual difference, whether they assume the “fact” of gender or, like Derrida, deny

it; and further, that the representation of violence is inseparable from the notion of gender, even when the latter is explicitly “deconstructed” or, more exactly, indicted as “ideology.” I contend, in short, that violence is engendered in representation.

Violence En-gendered

In reviewing the current scholarship on family violence, Wini Breines and Linda Gordon begin by saying: “Only a few decades ago, the term ‘family violence’ would have had no meaning: child abuse, wife beating, and incest would have been understood but not recognized as serious social problems” (1983, p. 490). In particular, while child abuse had been “discovered” as far back as the 1870s, but later lost visibility, social science research on wife beating (more often called “spouse abuse” or “marital violence”) is altogether recent; and incest, though long labeled a crime, was thought to be rare and, in any event, not related to (family) violence. In other words, the concept of a form of violence institutionally inherent—if not quite institutionalized—in the family, did not exist as long as the expression “family violence” did not.

Breines and Gordon, a sociologist and a historian, are keenly aware of the semiotic, discursive dimension of the social. Thus, they go on to argue, if the great majority of scholarly studies still come short of a coherent understanding of family violence as a social problem, the reason is that, with the exception of feminist writers, clinicians, and a few male empirical researchers, the work in this area fails to analyze the terms of its own inquiry, especially terms such as *family*, *power*, and *gender*. For, Breines and Gordon maintain, violence between intimates must be seen in the wider context of social power relations; and gender is absolutely central to the family. In fact, we may add, it is as necessary to the constitution of the family as it is itself, in turn, forcefully constructed and inevitably reproduced by the family. Moreover, they continue, institutions such as the medical and other “helping professions” (e.g., the police and the judiciary) are complicit, or at least congruent, with “the social construction of battering.” For example, a study (Stark, Flitcraft, and Frazier 1979) of how the emergency room of a city hospital treated women for injuries or symptoms while completely ignoring the causes, if the injuries resulted from battering, shows how the institution of medicine “coerce[s] women who are appealing for help back into the situations and relationships that batter them. It shows a system taking women who were hit, and turning them into battered women” (1983, p. 519).

The similarity of this critical position with that of Michel Foucault, him-

self a social historian, is striking, though no reference is made to his works (among them, *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* would be quite germane). But what the similarity makes apparent and even more striking is the difference of the two positions; that difference being, again, gender—not only the notion of gender, which is pivotal to the argument of Breines and Gordon, and largely irrelevant to Foucault's, but also, I will dare say, the gender of the authors. For it is feminism, the historical practice of the women's movement and the discourses which have emerged from it—such as the collective speaking, confrontation, and reconceptualization of the female's experience of sexuality—that inform the epistemological perspective of Breines and Gordon. They refute the idea that all violence is of similar origin, whether that origin be located in the individual (deviance) or in an abstract, transhistorical notion of society ("a sick society"). And they counter the dominant representation of violence as a "breakdown in social order" by proposing instead that violence is the sign of "a power struggle for the maintenance of a certain kind of social order" (1983, p. 511). But which kind of social order is in question, to be maintained or to be dismantled, is just what is at stake in the discourse on family violence. It is also where Breines and Gordon differ from Foucault.

As they see it, both the intrafamily and the gender-neutral methodological perspectives on incest, for instance, which are often found combined, are motivated by the desire to explain away a reality too uncomfortable or threatening to nonfeminists. (In spite of the agreement among statistical studies that, in cases of incest as well as child sexual abuse, 92% of the victims are females and 97% of the assailants are males, "predictably enough, until very recently the clinical literature ignored this feature of incest, implying that, for example, mother-son incest was as prevalent as father-daughter incest" [1983, p. 523].) Such studies not only obscure the actual history of violence against women, but by disregarding the feminist critique of patriarchy, they effectively discourage analysis of family violence from a context of both societal and male supremacy. Following up on the insights provided by Breines and Gordon, one can see that this is undoubtedly the rhetorical function of gender-neutral expressions such as "spouse abuse" or "marital violence," which at once imply that both spouses may equally engage in battering the other, and subtly hint at the writer's or speaker's non-partisan stance of scientific and moral neutrality. Put another way, even as those studies purport to remain innocent of the ideology or of the rhetoric of violence, they cannot avoid and indeed purposefully engage in the violence of rhetoric.

Foucault, on his part, is well aware of the paradox. The social, as he envisions it, is a field of forces, a crisscrossing of practices and discourses involving relations of power. With regard to the latter, individuals, groups,

or classes assume variable positions, exercising at once power and resistance in an interplay of non-egalitarian but mobile, changeable relations; for the very existence of power relations “depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance . . . present everywhere in the power network” (Foucault 1980, p. 94). Both power and resistance, then, operate concurrently in “the strategic field” which constitutes the social, and both traverse or spread across—rather than inhere in or belong to—institutions, social stratifications, and individual unities. However, it is power, not resistance or negativity, that is the positive condition of knowledge. Far from being an agency of repression, power is a productive force that weaves through the social body as a network of discourses and generates simultaneously forms of knowledge and forms of subjectivity, or what we call social subjects. Here, one would think, the rhetoric of power and the power of rhetoric are one and the same thing. Indeed, he writes,

this history of sexuality, or rather this series of studies concerning the historical relationships of power and the discourse on sex is, I realize, a circular project in the sense that it involves two endeavors that refer back to one another. We shall try to rid ourselves of a juridical and negative representation of power, and cease to conceive of it in terms of law, prohibition, liberty, and sovereignty. But how then do we analyze what has occurred in recent history with regard to this thing—seemingly one of the most forbidden areas of our lives and bodies—that is sex? How, if not by way of prohibition and blockage, does power gain access to it? (1980, p. 90)

His answer posits the notion of a “technology” of sex, a set of “techniques for maximizing life” (1980, p. 123) developed and deployed by the bourgeoisie since the end of the eighteenth century in order to ensure its class survival and continued hegemony. Those techniques involved the elaboration of discourses (classification, measurements, evaluation, etc.) about four privileged “figures” or objects of knowledge: the sexualization of children and the female body, the control of procreation, and the psychiatrization of anomalous sexual behavior as perversion. These discourses—which were implemented through pedagogy, medicine, demography, and economics, were anchored or supported by the institutions of the state, and became especially focused on the family—served to disseminate and to “implant” those figures and modes of knowledge into each individual, family, and institution. This technology “made sex not only a secular concern but a concern of the state as well; to be more exact, sex became a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals, to place themselves under surveillance” (1980, p. 116).

Sexuality, then, is not a property of bodies or something originally existent in human beings, but the product of that technology. What we call sexuality, Foucault states, is “the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors,

and social relations" by the deployment of "a complex political technology" (1980, p. 127), which is to say, by the deployment of sexuality. The analysis is in fact circular, however attractive or fitting. Sexuality is produced discursively (institutionally) by power, and power is produced institutionally (discursively) by the deployment of sexuality. Such a representation, like Foucault's view of the social, leaves no event or phenomenon out of the reach of its discursive power; nothing escapes from the discourse of power, nothing exceeds the totalizing power of discourse. His conclusion, therefore, is at best paradoxical. "We must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power. The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures" (1980, p. 157)—as if bodies and pleasures existed apart from the discursive order, from language or representation. But then they would exist in a space which his theory precisely locates outside the social.

I have suggested elsewhere that there may be a discrepancy between Foucault's theory and radical politics (his interventions in issues of capital punishment, prison revolts, psychiatric clinics, judiciary scandals, etc.), a discrepancy which can be accounted for by a contradiction perhaps inescapable at this time in history: the twin and opposite pull exerted on any progressive or radical thinker by the positivity of political action, on one front, and the negativity of critical theory, on the other. The contradiction is most evident, for me, in the efforts to elaborate a feminist theory of culture, history, representation, or subjectivity. Since feminism begins at home, so to speak, as a collective reflection on practice, on experience, on the personal as political, and on the politics of subjectivity, a feminist theory exists as such only insofar as it refers and constantly comes back to these issues. The contradictory pressure toward affirmative political action (the "counterattack") and toward the theoretical negation of patriarchal culture and social relations is glaring, unavoidable, and probably even constitutive of the specificity of feminist thought. In Foucault, the effect of that discrepancy (if my hypothesis is correct) has prompted charges of "paradoxical conservatism."³

For example, his political stance on the issue of rape, in the context of the reform of criminal law in France, has been criticized by French feminists as more subtly pernicious than the traditional, "naturalist" ideology. Arguing for the decriminalization (and the desexualization) of rape, in a volume published in 1977 by the Change collective with the title *La folie encerclée*, Foucault proposed that rape should be treated as an act of violence like any other, an act of aggression rather than a sexual act. A similar position was also held by some American feminists (e.g., Brownmiller 1975), though with the opposite intent with regard to its juridical implications, and has been acutely criticized within American feminism: "Taking rape from the

realm of 'the sexual,' placing it in the realm of 'the violent,' allows one to be against it without raising any questions about the extent to which the institution of heterosexuality has defined force as a normal part of [(hetero)sexual relations]" (MacKinnon 1979, p. 219). In the terms of Foucault's theoretical analysis, his proposal may be understood as an effort to counter the technology of sex by breaking the bond between sexuality and crime; an effort to enfranchise sexual behaviors from legal punishment, and so to render the sexual sphere free from intervention by the state. Such a form of "local resistance" on behalf of the men imprisoned on, or subject to, charges of rape, however, would paradoxically but practically work to increase and further to legitimate the *sexual* oppression of women. As Monique Plaza puts it, it is a matter of "our costs and their benefits." For what is rape if not a sexual practice, she asks, an act of *sexual* violence? While it may not be exclusively practiced on women; "rape is sexual essentially because it rests on the very social difference between the sexes. It is *social sexing* which is latent in rape. If men rape women, it is precisely because they are women in a social sense"; and when a male is raped, he too is raped "as a woman" (Plaza 1980, p. 31).

This allows us to unravel the contradiction at the heart of Foucault's modest proposal, a contradiction which his analysis of sexuality does not serve to resolve: to speak against sexual penalization and repression, in our society, is to uphold the sexual oppression of women, or, better, to uphold the practices and institutions that produce "woman" in terms of the sexual, and then oppression in terms of gender. (Which, of course, is not to say that oppression is not also produced in other terms.) To release "bodies and pleasures" from the legal control of the state, and from the relations of power exercised through the technology of sex, is to affirm and perpetuate the present social relations which give men rights over women's bodies. To decriminalize rape is, as Plaza states—making full use of the rhetoric of violence in her political confrontation with Foucault—to "defend the rights of the rapists from the position of potential rapist that you are 'subjected' to by your status as a man" (1980, p. 33). Here Plaza sharply identifies the problem in Foucault's own "enunciative modality" (defined in Foucault 1972); that is to say, the place or sociosexual position from which he speaks, that of the male or male-sexed subject. For sexuality, not only in the general and traditional discourse but in Foucault's as well, is construed not as gendered (as having a male form and a female form) but simply as male. Even when it is located, as it very often is, *in* the woman's body, sexuality is an attribute or property of the male. It is in this sense, in light of that "enunciative modality" common to all the accepted discourses in Western culture (but not only there), that Adrienne Rich's notion of "compulsory heterosexuality" acquires its profoundest resonance and

productivity. And in this sense her argument is not at the margins of feminism, as she seems to fear, but quite central to it (Rich 1980).

The historical fact of gender, the fact that it exists in social reality, that it has concrete existence in cultural forms and actual weight in social relations, makes gender a political issue that cannot be evaded or wished away, much as one would want to, be one male or female. For even as we agree that sexuality is socially constructed and overdetermined, we cannot deny the particular specification of gender that is the issue of that process; nor can we deny that precisely such process finally positions women and men in an antagonistic and asymmetrical relation. The interests of men and women, or, in the case in question earlier, of rapists and their victims, are exactly opposed in the practices of social reality, and cannot be reconciled rhetorically. That is the blind spot in Foucault's radical politics and anti-humanist theory, both of which must and do appeal to feminists as valuable contributions to the critique of ideology (see, for example, Martin [1982] and Doane, Mellencamp, and Williams [1984]). Therefore, illuminating as his work is to our understanding of the mechanics of power in social relations, its critical value is limited by his unconcern for what, after him, we might call "the technology of gender"—the techniques and discursive strategies by which gender is constructed and hence, as I argue, violence is en-gendered.

But there may be another chestnut in the fire, another point at issue. To say that (A) the concept of "family violence" did not exist before the expression came into being, as I said earlier, is not the same as saying that (B) family violence did not exist before "family violence" became part of the discourse of social science. The enormously complex relation binding expression, content, and referent (or sign, meaning, and object) is what makes (A) and (B) not the same. It seems to me that of the three—the concept, the expression, and the violence—only the first two belong to Foucault's discursive order. The third is somewhere else, like "bodies and pleasures," outside the social. Now, for those of us whose bodies and whose pleasures are out there, where the violence is (in that we have no language, enunciative position, or power apparatus to speak them), the risk of saying yes to sex-desire and power is relatively small, and amounts to a choice between the devil and the deep blue sea. If we then want to bring our bodies and our pleasures closer, where we might see what they are like; better still, where we might represent them from another perspective, construct them with another standard of measurement, or understand them within other terms of analysis; in short, if we want to attempt to know them, we have to leave Foucault and turn, for the time being, to Peirce.

For Peirce, the object has more weight, as it were. The real, the physical

world and empirical reality are of greater consequence to the human activity of semiosis, as outlined by Charles Sanders Peirce, than they are to the symbolic activity of signification, as defined in Saussure's theory of language and reelaborated in contemporary French thought. Saussure's insistence on the arbitrary or unmotivated nature of the linguistic sign caused semiology to extend the categorical distinction between language (*langue*, the language system) and reality to all forms and processes of representation, and thus to posit an essential discontinuity between the orders of the symbolic and the real. Thereafter, not only would the consideration of the referent be no longer pertinent—or even possible—to the account of signification processes; but the different status of the signifier and the signified would be questioned. The signified would be seen as either inaccessible, separated from the signifier by the “bar” of repression (Lacan 1966, p. 497), or equally engaged in the “play of differences” that make up the system of signifiers and the domain of signification (Derrida 1976a, p. 7). The work of the sign, in brief, would have no reference and no purchase on the real. For Peirce, on the other hand, the “outer world” enters into semiosis at both ends of the signifying process: first through the object, more specifically the “dynamic object,” and second through the final interpretant. That complicates the picture in which a signifier would immediately correspond to a signified (Saussure) or merely refer to another signifier (Lacan, Derrida). Take the famous definition:

A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, it creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground* of the representation. (Peirce 2.228)

As Umberto Eco observes in his brilliant essay “Peirce and the Semiotic Foundations of Openness” (1979, pp. 175–99), the notions of meaning, ground, and interpretant all pertain in some degree to the area of the signified, while interpretant and ground also pertain in some degree to the area of the referent (object). Moreover, Peirce distinguishes between the dynamic object and the immediate object, and it is the notion of ground that sustains the distinction. The dynamic object is external to the sign: it is that which “by some means contrives to determine the sign to its representation” (4.536). The immediate object, instead, is internal; it is an “Idea” or a “mental representation,” “the object as the sign itself represents it” (4.536).

From the analysis of the notion of “ground” (a sort of context of the sign,

which makes pertinent certain attributes or aspects of the object and thus is already a component of meaning), Eco argues that not only does the sign in Peirce appear as a textual matrix; the object, too, "is not necessarily a thing or a state of the world but a rule, a law, a prescription: it appears as the operational description of a set of possible experiences" (1979, p. 181).

Signs have a direct connection with Dynamic Objects only insofar as objects determine the formation of a sign; on the other hand, signs only "know" Immediate Objects, that is, meanings. There is a difference between the *object of which a sign is a sign* and the *object of a sign*: the former is the Dynamic Object, a state of the outer world; the latter is a semiotic construction. (Eco 1979, p. 193).

But the immediate object's relation to the representamen is established by the interpretant, which is itself another sign, "perhaps a more developed sign." Thus, in the process of unlimited semiosis, the nexus object-sign-meaning is a series of ongoing mediations between "outer world" and "inner" or mental representations. The key term, the principle that supports the series of mediations, is of course the interpretant.

As Peirce sees it, "the problem of what the 'meaning' of an intellectual concept is can only be solved by the study of the interpretants, or proper significate effects, of signs" (5.475). He then describes three general classes.

(1) "The first proper significate effect of a sign is a *feeling* produced by it." This is the *emotional* interpretant. Although its "foundation of truth" may be slight at times, often it remains the only effect produced by a sign, such as, for example, the performance of a piece of music.

(2) When a further significate effect is produced, however, it is "through the mediation of the emotional interpretant"; and this second type of meaning effect he calls the *energetic* interpretant, for it involves an "effort," which may be a muscular exertion but is more usually a mental effort, "an exertion upon the Inner World."

(3) The third and final type of meaning effect that may be produced by the sign, through the mediation of the former two, is "a *habit-change*": "a modification of a person's tendencies toward action, resulting from previous experiences or from previous exertions." This is the "ultimate" interpretant of the sign, the effect of meaning on which the process of semiosis, in the instance considered, comes to rest. "The real and living logical conclusion is that habit," Peirce states, and designates the third type of significate effect, the *logical* interpretant. But immediately he adds a qualification, distinguishing this logical interpretant from the concept or "intellectual" sign:

The concept which is a logical interpretant is only imperfectly so. It somewhat partakes of the nature of a verbal definition, and is as inferior to the

habit, and much in the same way, as a verbal definition is inferior to the real definition. The deliberately formed, self-analyzing habit—self-analyzing because formed by the aid of analysis of the exercises that nourished it—is the living definition, the veritable and final logical interpretant. (5.491)

The final interpretant, then, is not “logical” in the sense in which a syllogism is logical, or because it is the result of an “intellectual” operation such as deductive reasoning. It is logical in that it is “self-analyzing,” or, we might say, in that it makes sense of the emotion and muscular/mental effort which preceded it by providing a conceptual representation of that effort. Such a representation is implicit in the notion of habit as a “tendency toward action” and in the solidarity of habit and belief (5.538)

Peirce’s formulation of the ultimate interpretant maps another path or a way back from semiosis to reality. For Eco, it provides the “missing link” between signification and concrete action. The final interpretant, he states, is not a Platonic essence or a transcendental law of signification but a result, as well as a rule: “To have understood the sign as a rule through the series of its interpretants means to have acquired the habit to act according to the prescription given by the sign. The action is the place in which the *haecceitas* ends the game of semiosis” (1979, pp. 194–95). But we should go further in our reading of Peirce, and so enter into a territory where Eco fears to tread, the terrain of subjectivity.

When Peirce speaks of habit as the result of a process involving emotion, muscular and mental exertion, and some kind of conceptual representation (the “final logical interpretant”), he is thinking of individual persons as the subject of such process. If the modification of consciousness, the habit or habit-change, is indeed the meaning effect, the “real and living” conclusion of each single process of semiosis, then where “the game of semiosis” ends, time and time again, is not exactly “concrete action,” as Eco sees it, but a person’s (subjective) disposition, a readiness (to action), a set of expectations. For the chain of meaning comes to a halt, however temporarily, by anchoring itself to somebody, to some body, an individual subject.⁴ Thus, as we use signs or produce interpretants, their significate effects must pass through each of us, each body and each consciousness, before they may produce an effect or an action upon the world. Finally, then, the individual’s habit as a semiotic production is both the result and the condition of the social production of meaning.

Clearly, this reading of Peirce points toward a possible elaboration of semiotics as a theory of culture that hinges on a historical, materialist, *and* gendered subject—a project that cannot be pursued here. What I wish to stress, for the sake of the present discussion, is the sense of a certain weight of the object in semiosis, an overdetermination wrought into the work of the sign by the real, or what we take as reality, even if it is itself already an

interpretant; and hence the sense that experience (habit), however mis-recognized or misconstrued, is indissociable from meaning; and therefore that practices—events and behaviors occurring in social formations—weigh in the constitution of subjectivity as much as does language. In that sense, too, violence is not simply “in” language or “in” representation, but it also thereby en-gendered.

Violence and Representation

When one first surveys the representations of violence in general terms, there seem to be two kinds of violence with respect to its object: male and female. I do not mean that the “victims” of such kinds of violence are men and women, but rather that the object on which or to which the violence is done is what establishes the meaning of the represented act; and that object is perceived or apprehended as either feminine or masculine. An obvious example of the first instance is “nature,” as in the expression “the rape of nature,” which at once defines nature as feminine, and rape as violence done to a feminine other (whether its physical object be a woman, a man, or an inanimate object). Speculating on the particular rhetoric of violence that permeates the discourse in which scientists describe their encounter with the unknown, Evelyn Fox Keller finds a recurrent thematics of conquest, domination, and aggression reflecting a “basic adversarial relation to the object of study.”

Problems, for many scientists, are things to be ‘attacked,’ ‘licked’ or ‘conquered.’ If more subtle means fail, then one resorts to ‘brute force,’ to the ‘hammer and tongs’ approach. In the effort to ‘master’ nature, to ‘storm her strongholds and castles,’ science can come to sound like a battlefield. Sometimes, such imagery becomes quite extreme, exceeding even the conventional imagery of war. Note, for example, the language in which one scientist describes his pursuit: ‘I liked to follow the workings of another mind through these minute, teasing investigations to see a relentless observer get hold of Nature and squeeze her until the sweat broke out all over her and her sphincters loosened’ (Keller 1983, p. 20).

The “genderization of science,” as Keller calls the association of scientific thought with masculinity and of the scientific domain with femininity, is a pervasive metaphor in the discourse of science, from Bacon’s prescription of “a chaste and lawful marriage between Mind and Nature” to Bohr’s chosen emblem, the yin-yang symbol, for his coat of arms (Keller 1978, pp. 413 and 432). It is a compelling representation, whose effects for the ideology and the practice of science, as well as for the subjectivity of individual scientists, are all the more forceful since the representation is

treated as a myth; that is to say, while the genderization of science is admitted and encouraged in the realm of common knowledge, it is simultaneously denied entry or currency in the realm of formal knowledge (Keller 1978, p. 410). Such is the case not only in the "hard" sciences, so-called, but also more often than not in the "softer" disciplines and even, ironically enough, in the study of myth.

The other kind of violence is that which in *Violence and the Sacred* René Girard has aptly called "violent reciprocity," the acting out of "rivalry" between brothers or between father and son, and which is socially held in check by the institution of kinship, ritual, and other forms of mimetic violence (war and sport come immediately to mind). The distinctive trait here is the "reciprocity" and thus, by implication, the equality of the two terms of the violent exchange, the "subject" and the "object" engaged in the rivalry; and consequently the masculinity attributed, in this particular case, to the object. For the subject of the violence is always, by definition, masculine; "man" is by definition the subject of culture and of any social act.⁵

In the mythical text, for example, according to Lotman's theory of plot typology, there are only two characters, the hero and the obstacle or boundary. The first is the mythical subject, who moves through the plot-space establishing differences and norms. The second is but a function of that space, a marker of boundary, and therefore inanimate even when anthropomorphized.

Characters can be divided into those who are mobile, who enjoy freedom with regard to plot-space, who can change their place in the structure of the artistic world and cross the frontier, the basic topological feature of this space, and those who are immobile, who represent, in fact, a function of this space. Looked at typologically, the initial situation is that a certain plot-space is divided by a *single* boundary into an internal and an external sphere, and a *single* character has the opportunity to cross that boundary. Inasmuch as closed space can be interpreted as 'a cave', 'the grave', 'a house', 'woman' (and, correspondingly, be allotted the features of darkness, warmth, dampness), entry into it is interpreted on various levels as 'death', 'conception', 'return home' and so on; moreover all these acts are thought of as mutually identical. (Lotman 1979, pp. 167–68)

In the mythical text, then, the hero must be male regardless of the gender of the character, because the obstacle, whatever its personification (sphinx or dragon, sorceress or villain), is morphologically female—and indeed, simply, the womb, the earth, the space of his movement. As he crosses the boundary and "penetrates" the other space, the mythical subject is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is

not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter.

Narrative cinema, too, performs a similar inscription of gender in its visual figuration of the masculine and the feminine positions. The woman, fixed in the position of icon, spectacle, or image to be looked at, bears the mobile look of both the spectator and the male character(s). It is the latter who commands at once the action and the landscape, and who occupies the position of subject of vision, which he relays to the spectator. As Laura Mulvey shows in her analysis of the complex relations of narrative and visual pleasure, "sadism demands a story" (1975, p. 14). Thus, if Oedipus has become a paradigm of human life and error, narrative temporality and dramatic structure, one may be entitled to wonder whether that is purely due to the artistry of Sophocles or the widespread influence of Freud's theory of human psychic development in our culture; or whether it might not also be due to the fact that, like the best of stories and better than most, the story of Oedipus weaves the inscription of violence (and family violence, at that) into the representation of gender.

I will now turn to two celebrated critical texts, which exemplify two discursive strategies deployed in the construction of gender and two distinctive rhetorical configurations of violence. The first is Lévi-Strauss's reading, in "The Effectiveness of Symbols" (Lévi-Strauss 1967), of a Cuna incantation performed to facilitate difficult childbirth; a reading which prompts him to make a daring parallel between shamanistic practices and psychoanalysis, and allows him to elaborate his crucial notion of the unconscious as symbolic function. The shaman's cure consists, he states, "in making explicit a situation originally existing on the emotional level and in rendering acceptable to the mind pains which the body refuses to tolerate" by provoking an experience "through symbols, that is, through meaningful equivalents of things meant which belong to a another order of reality" (1967, pp. 192 and 196). Whereas the arbitrary pains are alien and unacceptable to the woman, the supernatural monsters evoked by the shaman in his symbolic narrative are part of a coherent system on which the native conception of the universe is founded. By calling upon the myth, the shaman reintegrates the pains within a conceptual and meaningful whole, and "provides the sick [*sic*] woman with a *language*, by means of which unexpressed, and otherwise inexpressible, psychic states can be immediately expressed" (1967, p. 193). Both the shaman's cure and psychoanalytic therapy, argues Lévi-Strauss, albeit with an inversion of all the elements, are done by means of a manipulation carried out through symbols which constitute a meaningful code, a language.

Let us consider now the structure of the myth in question and the performative value of the shaman's narrative. For, after all, the incantation

is a ritual, though based on myth. It has, that is, a practical purpose: it seeks to effect a physical, somatic transformation in its addressee. The main actors are the shaman, performing the incantation, and the woman in labor whose body is to undergo the transformation, to become actively engaged in expelling the full-grown fetus and bringing forth the child. In the myth which subtends the incantation, one would think, the hero must be a woman or at least a female spirit, goddess, or totemic ancestor. But it is not so. Not only is the hero a male, personified by the shaman, as are his helpers, also symbolized with decidedly phallic attributes; and not only is the incantation intended to effect the childbearing woman's identification with the male hero in his struggle with the villain (a *female* deity who has taken possession of the woman's body and soul). But, more important, the incantation aims at detaching the woman's identification or perception of self from her own body. It seeks to sever her identification with a body which she must come to perceive precisely as a space, the territory in which the battle is waged. The hero's victory then results in his recapturing the woman's soul, and his descent through the landscape of her body symbolizes the (now) unimpeded descent of the fetus along the birth canal.

The effectiveness of symbols, the work of the symbolic function in the unconscious, would thus effect a splitting of the female subject's identification into the two mythical positions of hero (the human subject) and boundary (spatially fixed object or personified obstacle—her body). The doubt that the apprehension of one's body or oneself as obstacle, landscape, or battlefield may not "provide the woman with a language" does not cross the text. But whether or not this construct would "make sense" to the Cuna woman for whose benefit the ritual is presumably performed, Lévi-Strauss's interpretation must be acceptable in principle to Lotman, Girard, and any others who look on the history of the human race from the anthropological perspective and within an epistemology wherein "biological" sexual difference is the ground (in Peirce's term) of gender. In that perspective, woman remains outside of history. She is Mother and Nature, matrix and matter, "an equivalent more universal than money," as Lea Melandri accurately phrased it (1977, p. 27). The discourse of the sciences of man constructs the object as female and the female as object. That, I suggest, is its rhetoric of violence, even when the discourse presents itself as humanistic, benevolent, or well-intentioned.

Indeed, Derrida criticizes Lévi-Strauss's paternalistic attitude toward his objects of study (the Nambikwara), as well as the naiveté by which he regards them as an "innocent" people because they have no written language. In such a community, described in the autobiographical *Tristes Tropiques*, violence would be introduced by Western civilization, and actually erupts as the anthropologist (Lévi-Strauss himself, who recounts the event)

teaches a group of children how to write. The "revenge" of one little girl, struck by another during the "Writing Lesson," consists in revealing to the anthropologist the "secret" of the other girl's proper name, which the Nambikwara are not allowed to use. What is ingenuous, for Derrida, is Lévi-Strauss's ostensible belief that writing is merely the phonetic notation of speech, and that violence is an effect of written language (civilization) rather than of language as such; for "all societies capable of producing, that is to say of obliterating, their proper names, and of bringing classificatory difference into play, practice writing in general" (Derrida 1976a, p. 109).

To name, to give names that it will on occasion be forbidden to pronounce, such is the originary violence of language which consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying, in suspending the vocative absolute. To think the unique *within* the system, to inscribe it there, such is the gesture of the arche-writing: arche-violence, loss of the proper, of absolute proximity, of self-presence. Out of this arche-violence, forbidden and therefore confirmed by a second violence that is reparatory, protective, instituting the 'moral,' prescribing the concealment of writing and the effacement and obliteration of the so-called proper name which was already dividing the proper, a third violence can *possibly* emerge or not (an empirical possibility) within what is commonly called evil, war, indiscretion, rape; which consists of revealing by effraction the so-called proper name, the originary violence which has severed the proper from its property and its self-sameness [*proprété*]. (1976a, p. 112).

Empirical or common violence (and we cannot help remarking the text's own classificatory play in the listing of signifiers: evil, war, indiscretion, rape) is "more complex" than the other two levels to which it refers, namely, arche-violence and law. Unfortunately for us, however, Derrida is not concerned to analyze it or to suggest why, how, or when it may possibly emerge. He only implies that the emergence of empirical violence, the fact of violence in society, is no accident, though Lévi-Strauss would need to see it as an accident in order to maintain his belief in the natural innocence and goodness of the primitive culture. From Rousseau and the eighteenth century, Derrida concludes, Lévi-Strauss has inherited an archaeology which "is also a teleology and an eschatology": "The dream of a full and immediate presence closing history [suppresses] contradiction and difference" (1976a, p. 115).

The rhetorical construct of a "violence of the letter," the originary violence which preempts presence, identity, and property or propriety, is perhaps more accessible in another of Derrida's own works, *Spurs*, where he performs a reading of Nietzsche and, with him, addresses just what he claimed that Lévi-Strauss suppressed—contradiction and difference. This could be my second textual *exemplum*, whereby to illustrate what I earlier

called the violence of rhetoric. It would support my contention that, while Derrida's discourse denies the fact of gender, its "becoming woman" depends on the same construct of sexual difference precisely if naively and traditionally articulated by Lévi-Strauss (1969).

Were I to do so, however, I would earn Derrida's contempt for "those women feminists so derided by Nietzsche," I would put myself in the position of one "who aspires to be like a man," who "seeks to castrate" and "wants a castrated woman" (Derrida 1976b, p. 53). I shall not do so, therefore. Decency and shame prevent me, though nothing more. I shall instead approach Derrida's text obliquely—a gesture the philosopher may not find displeasing—by way of another's reading, or a quadruple displacement, if you will.

"The discourse of man," writes Gayatri Spivak, "is in the metaphor of woman" (1983, p. 169). The problem with phallogentrism "is not merely one of psycho-socio-sexual behavior [as, we recall, Foucault would have it] but of the production and consolidation of reference and meaning" (1983, p. 169). Derrida's critique of phallogentrism—deconstruction—takes the woman as "model" for the deconstructive discourse. It takes the woman as model because, as Spivak reads (Derrida reading) Nietzsche, the woman can fake an orgasm, while the man cannot:

Women impersonate themselves as having an orgasm even at the time of orgasm. Within the historical understanding of women as incapable of orgasm, Nietzsche is arguing that impersonating is woman's only sexual pleasure. (Spivak 1983, p. 170)

Thus, in what appears to me as a case of inscribing gender with a vengeance, Derrida searches for the name of the mother in *Glas*; elsewhere, he uses the "name of woman" to question the "we-men" of the philosophers (1983, p. 173); and *Dissemination* takes the hymen as figure for the text, the undecidability of meaning, the "law of the textual operation—of reading, writing, philosophizing" (1983, p. 175).

Deconstruction thus effects "a feminization of the practice of philosophy," Spivak observes (with a phrase that reminds me immediately of Keller's "genderization of science"), adding that she does not regard it as "just another example of the masculine use of woman as instrument of self-assertion" (1983, p. 173). For if man can never "fully disown his status as subject," and if desire must still "be expressed as man's desire," yet the deconstructor's enterprise—seeking his own displacement "by taking the woman as object or figure"—is an "unusual and courageous" one. Regrettably, one must infer, Spivak is led to admit that the question of woman, asked in the way Nietzsche and Derrida ask it, "is *their* question, not *ours*" (1983, p. 184). Then she suggests, "with respect," that such a feminization

of philosophy as serves the male deconstructor "might find its most adequate legend in male homosexuality defined as criminality, and that it cannot speak for the woman" (1983, p. 177). One can only conclude that, insofar as the "deconstructor" is a woman, the value of that critical practice ("the 'patriarchy's' own self-critique") is at best ambiguous. We can produce, as Spivak recommends, "useful and scrupulous fake readings in the place of the passively active fake orgasm" (1983, p. 186), but we will not have come at all closer to understanding, representing, or reconstructing our bodies and our pleasures otherwise.

For the female subject, finally, gender marks the limit of deconstruction, the rocky bed (so to speak) of the "abyss of meaning." Which is not to say that woman, femininity, or femaleness is any more or any less outside discourse than anything else is. This is precisely the insistent emphasis of feminist criticism: gender must be accounted for. It must be understood not as a "biological" difference that lies before or beyond signification, or as a culturally constructed object of masculine desire, but as semiotic difference—a different production of reference and meaning such as, not Derrida and not Foucault, but possibly Peirce's notion of semiosis may allow us to begin to chart. Clearly, the time of "replacing feminist criticism" (Kamuf 1982) has not come.

Notes

1. In Barbara Harlow's translation of *Spurs*, the quotations from Nietzsche incorporated in Derrida's text are given in the words of the English translation by Thomas Common (*Joyful Wisdom* [New York: Frederick Ungar, 1960]). I have preferred to use Walter Kaufmann's translation in *The Gay Science* (1974), both below and, somewhat modified, in my epigraph above, which is from paragraph 64. In the passage cited by Derrida from *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (paragraph 71, "On female chastity"), Nietzsche is speaking of the contradiction which upper-class women, reared in total ignorance of sexuality, must encounter at the moment of marriage. From their supposed ignorance of sex, Nietzsche mockingly laments, women are "hurled, as by a gruesome lightning bolt, into reality and knowledge, by marriage—precisely by the man they love and esteem most! To catch love and shame in a contradiction and to be forced to experience at the same time delight, surrender, duty, pity, terror, and who knows what else, in the face of the unexpected neighborliness of god and beast! . . . Even the compassionate curiosity of the wisest student of humanity is inadequate for guessing how this or that woman manages to accommodate herself to *this solution of the riddle*, and to *the riddle of a solution*, and what dreadful, far-reaching suspicions must stir in her poor, unhinged soul—and how the ultimate philosophy and skepsis of woman casts anchor at this point!" I have italicized the phrases which Derrida takes out of context and recasts in the frame of his interpretation of Nietzsche. As will be discussed later, Derrida reads in Nietzsche a progressive valorization of woman as a self-affirming power, "a dissimulatress, an artist, a dionysiac"; and this is the "affirmative woman" that Derrida takes as his model for "writing," for the critical operation of questioning, doubting, or "deconstructing" all truths.

2. For an interesting discussion of Salomé's writing, figure, and historiographical "legend" from the perspective of present-day feminism, see Martin (1982). The quotation from Salomé's *Zur Psychologie der Frau*, which appears at the beginning of this essay, is cited in Martin (1982, p. 29).

3. "Paradoxical conservatism," I have argued, "is a very appropriate phrase for a major theoretician of social history who writes of power and resistance, bodies and pleasures and sexuality as if the ideological structures and effects of patriarchy had nothing to do with history, as if they had no discursive status or political implications. The rape and sexual extortion performed on little girls by young and adult males is a 'bit of theatre,' a petty 'everyday occurrence in the life of village sexuality,' purely 'inconsequential bucolic pleasures' [Foucault 1980, pp. 31–32]. What really matters to the historian is the power of institutions, the mechanisms by which these bits of theatre become, he claims, pleasurable for the individuals involved—the men and the women, former little girls—who thus become complicit with those institutional apparatus" (de Lauretis 1984, p. 94). This passage, which I take the liberty of reprinting here, occurs in the context of my analysis of a film, Nicolas Roeg's *Bad Timing: A Sensual Obsession* (1980), in light of some of Foucault's ideas. The film is an interesting study of "marital violence," and an excellent visual-narrative text for a discussion of violence, representation, and gender.

4. My reading of Peirce's definition of the sign, and thus of the relationship of sign and subject, bears a comparison with Lacan's ostensibly antithetical formula ("a signifier represents a subject for another signifier"). I must again refer interested readers to chapter 6 of my book (1984) *Semiotics and Experience*, where a fuller discussion of Eco is also to be found.

5. Studies in language usage demonstrate that, if the term *man* includes women (while the obverse is not true, for the term *woman* is always gendered, i.e., sexually connoted), it is only to the extent that, in the given context, women are (to be) perceived as nongendered "human beings," and thus as man [see Spender (1980)]. For example, Lévi-Strauss's theory of kinship (1969) is based on the thesis that women are both like men and unlike men: they are human beings (like men), but their special function in culture and society is to be exchanged and circulated among men (unlike men). Because of their "value" as means of sexual gratification and reproduction, women are the means—objects and signs—of social communication (among human beings). Nevertheless, as he is unwilling to exclude women from humanity or "mankind," he compromises by saying that women are also human beings, although in the symbolic order of culture they do not speak, desire, or produce meaning *for themselves*, as men do, by means of the exchange of women. One can only conclude that, insofar as women are human beings, they are (like) men.

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