



International Web Journal  
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## Jacques Derrida: The *Perchance* of a Coming of the Otherwoman

The Deconstruction of 'Phallogocentrism' from Duel to Duo

CAROLE DELY

**Abstract:** That the questions surrounding woman, women, gender, or even sexual difference may be found at the heart of Jacques Derrida's deconstructive work is the signal that they constitute an obstacle within thought concerning the tradition, and hence within the tradition itself. Without opposing an *indoors* of the "library" to an *outdoors* of the world that would be heterogeneous, separate, deconstruction as practiced by Jacques Derrida beginning with great texts of the tradition is a reflection upon the world and upon life. Starting from the relevant fact that the tradition in part structured and built itself upon an exclusion of women and of the feminine, and deconstructing this history, he opens a space favorable to *the coming of the other*. By appealing to *the voice of the other*, he thus engages the *perchance* of a reorientation of discourse, history, and the tradition.

**Keywords:** Phallogocentrism ; Deconstruction ; Feminin ; Woman ; Gender ; Otherness

**Résumé:** Si les questions autour de la femme, des femmes, du genre, ou encore de la différence sexuelle se sont trouvées au coeur du travail déconstructif de Jacques Derrida, c'est en ce qu'elles constituent un point d'achoppement dans la réflexion faite sur la tradition, donc dans la tradition elle-même. Sans opposer un dedans de « la bibliothèque » à un *dehors* du monde qui soient hétérogènes, séparés, la déconstruction du modèle phallogocentrique à partir des grands textes de la tradition est une réflexion sur le monde et la vie. Partant du constat que la tradition s'est construite et bâtie en partie sur une exclusion des femmes et du féminin, et déconstruisant cette histoire, Derrida ouvre un espace propice à la venue de l'autre, *de l'autre-femme*. En appelant à la voix de l'autre, il engage le *peut-être* d'une réorientation du discours, de l'histoire et de sa tradition.

**Mots-clés:** Phallogocentrisme ; Déconstruction ; Féminin ; Femme ; Genre ; Altérité

# Jacques Derrida: The *Perchance* of a Coming of the Otherwoman<sup>1</sup>

Carole Dely

I deeply thank Wilson Baldrige<sup>2</sup> for this translation.

*With JD, Jean-Luc, Philippe L.L., Michel D., those men and women who have accompanied me and accompany me still.*

"And why not invent something else, another body?  
Another history? Another interpretation?"<sup>3</sup>

J. Derrida, *Pregnances*

The title I've given this paper — "*Jacques Derrida: The Perchance of a Coming of the Otherwoman*"<sup>4</sup> — indicates first of all that my subject will be "woman," as one says. I shall take it upon myself to talk about the woman, or women, about the female gender as distinguished from the male gender. It is worth noting that this subject has been in vogue for the past few decades in the Western world, that it is a new, even unprecedented subject, as though not enough, perhaps nothing at all, had been said about it in the past, as though our time wished to do it justice. This ties in with contemporary history as a whole, with the historically recent women's liberation movement, whether one places its beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century in various European countries. To reinstate the woman, the question of women and

<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented in French at the International Phenomenology Colloquium at the Catholic University of Porto Alegre, Brazil, June 2006. A first version was published in Sens Public in July, 2006, without the *post-pensum*.

Original French version : [http://www.sens-public.org/article.php3?id\\_article=297](http://www.sens-public.org/article.php3?id_article=297)

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Pregnances. Wash Paintings by Colette Deblé* (Mont de Marsan: L'Atelier des Brisants, 2004), p. 13

<sup>4</sup> *The deconstruction of "phallogocentrism" from duel to duo...* "and more than two, always more than two..."

of the feminine is like a contemporary watchword. In our time therefore one might think, here and now, that it is still a relatively virgin subject, hence new, after the image of a new land just beginning to be discovered or rediscovered. A new ground whence something as yet unknown still could come, something different, other... *perchance*. In this sense, we shall set over against or distinguish this new feminine terrain from another masculine terrain, recognized as dominant in history and the tradition.

These few remarks I just made may already seem arbitrary, thetical or polemical, stamped with ideology, to the point of thinking in terms of a certain "war between the sexes" involving a feminist clan against another one called phallogratic, and so forth. Let us understand that speaking out on this subject, whether it be the fact of a man or a woman, can hardly remain innocent. It is inscribed within a history, within a long tradition. And as soon as it is posed, the subject seems already always polemical. For instance: what is the woman's place in philosophical thought? Within creative thought in general? In politics, in political and social thought?... And if she seldom appears in actual fact, what is the woman's share of responsibility in this regard, and what is or was that of men? But then who are "the men" and who are "the women," do these two categories really exist like two clans, two adverse clans? Wouldn't it be better still to take care to distinguish individuals, singular individualities and personalities, to speak instead of "certain women", "certain men"?

All these questions are difficult, complex. And the greatest difficulty is that one cannot completely escape these questions, however much one might wish to. For after all, perhaps "the question of women" is no more pertinent than would be "a question of men" (for instance with regard to the recognition of their individual freedom). Apart from socio-historical circumstances, by right if you will, why would woman be more of a question than man? One might think there's a great deal of prejudice tangled up with all this, in such a way that it's become difficult to untangle the true from the false, as the philosopher Descartes would say. And prejudice can always impede the search for more serious thought, or one free of too much passion. But here again, the debate could be endless: perhaps one ought to demonstrate what was just said, which could appear as a thesis, a matter to be defended, as one speaks of "the feminist cause" to be defended... while waiting for "the masculine cause" to become one as well, yes perhaps, why not... and so forth.

I briefly recall this general context by way of introduction since it's the one in which I myself am led to speak. I'm speaking about this context, *about it* — understood both as *from this place* and as the subject I speak of. But now, my title indicates something else: though my topic is the woman, more specifically I shall talk about the question of a coming of the woman considered in her otherness and authenticity — the "otherwoman" — phrasing it in the form of *a perchance*. With Jacques Derrida, this word "perchance" always beckons toward the unpredictability of "what

happens”, of what comes, the incalculable coming of the other. Hence it is precisely from the angle of Jacques Derrida’s thought that I shall approach here the question of the woman and the feminine, in the present and within the tradition. My talk’s theme or questioning may be summarized as follows: why did Jacques Derrida devote a large portion of his work to thinking about the woman, the feminine, and what he calls “the deconstruction of phallogocentrism?” How did that come about, and where was he going with it?

In the time granted, with regard to such a vast theme, I shall be satisfied to resituate the question of phallogocentrism in the general context of Derridean deconstruction, and I shall apply myself to presenting a few examples of deconstructive strategies locatable in the work of Jacques Derrida. The aim of my talk may be hardly more than to seek to make tangible a certain atmosphere, hoping that already will be something.

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That the questions surrounding woman, women, gender, or even sexual difference may be found at the heart of Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive work is already quite significant. In itself it is the signal that they constitute an obstacle within thought concerning the tradition, and hence within the tradition itself, in other words within our history. Let’s recall that without opposing an *indoors* of the “library” to an *outdoors* of the world that would be heterogeneous, separate, deconstruction as practiced by Jacques Derrida beginning with great texts of the tradition is a reflection upon the world and upon life, within the threefold temporality of past, present, and time to come — “to come” understood here as what may be yet to arrive, which Jacques Derrida sets in opposition to the “future” of what is predictable and calculable. The work of writing, of speaking out are always inscribed within a tradition already there beforehand. Whether one refers to it directly or not, one speaks with that tradition in memory. As for Jacques Derrida, he preferred to refer to it, to the point of wanting passionately to call it into question. That memory is collected in the books produced over the centuries and that are left to us. In that way, for us they are like a mirror of the past world and history preceding us in time, and to which we perforce belong. In a sense, all one has to do is recognize it. And thus, for instance, here and now one would have to recognize that this great library of the world comprises a vast majority of male authors. Without even seeking an explanation for it, or looking for causes, all one has to do is recognize it. That’s the way things are, even if one cannot rigorously explain why they are that way. Moreover such a task of elucidation is quite difficult to accomplish, namely for the reasons and/or motives to which I was alluding in the introduction.

In an interview published in *Le Monde de l'éducation* (September, 2000)<sup>5</sup>, Jacques Derrida gave the practice of deconstruction of phallogocentrism this sense of a just recognition of the facts. Let me recall the context of the interview: Antoine Spire calls Jacques Derrida's attention to the fact that the feminine cause mobilized his work early on, that sexual difference is present in many of his texts. He responds, and I quote:

"I speak mostly, and have for a long time, about sexual differences, rather than about one difference only — twofold and oppositional — which is indeed, with phallogocentrism, with what I also nickname '*phallogocentrism*,' a structural feature of philosophical discourse that will have prevailed in the tradition. Deconstruction goes down that road in the first place. Everything comes back that way. *Before any feminist politicalization (and, although I've often associated myself with it, on certain conditions), it is important to recognize this strong phallogocentric underpinning that conditions just about all of our cultural heritage* [my emphasis, C.D.]. As for the properly philosophical tradition of this phallogocentric heritage, it is represented, certainly in different but equal ways, in Plato as well as in Freud or Lacan, in Kant as well as in Hegel, Heidegger, or Lévinas. In any case I've gone to some length to show as much."

It follows from these words that the deconstruction of phallogocentrism — but perhaps one could simply say "deconstruction" — is not a feminist or political stance, in any case not initially. And it is not a stance first of all because Jacques Derrida wants precisely to avoid the clear-cut judgment of a twofold opposition between man and woman. No doubt things are more complicated than that, one could no doubt think about them otherwise, rather than think of sexual differences in the plural (perhaps of a mix of genders between men and women, to the point of rethinking homosexuality too, whether feminine or masculine, and so forth). Let me repeat Jacques Derrida's words in order to underscore them: "Before any feminist politicalization, it is important to recognize this strong phallogocentric underpinning that conditions just about all of our cultural heritage." Thus for instance, in point of fact, or in any case those facts historically attested by the authorized books of the tradition, those that enjoy posthumous recognition, Jacques Derrida remarks during a filmed interview<sup>6</sup> that philosophy always has been linked to a masculine figure: "the philosopher" is a man, he also can be a father, but more rarely will be a woman or a mother (including in a symbolic sense that could apply just as well to a man).

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<sup>5</sup> « Entretien avec Jacques Derrida : autrui est secret parce qu'il est autre », in *Le Monde de l'éducation*, n°284, septembre, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> *Derrida (2002)*, a documentary directed by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman, United States, 2002 (1:24).

We can support this comment with simple historical data: from an academic point of view, that the philosopher might be physically a woman doubtless will have had no tangible reality before the tradition of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hannah Arendt, Simone Weil, Simone de Beauvoir...). But it is necessary to observe that these women philosophers found themselves in a situation where they had to think beginning with an ancient and overwhelmingly masculine tradition, built upon "a strong phallogocentric underpinning", to use Jacques Derrida's expression once again. In this way, that henceforth women may, since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, practice more freely our work of creative thought or literature does not settle all of the problems and questions, if one might say so. Here and now, we still live and think against the backdrop of an ancient heritage, marked by a certain exemplar, a certain "structural feature [...] that will have prevailed in the tradition." We're still bound to it, whether one be a woman or a man, but no doubt in a different manner depending on whether one is a man or a woman, each one otherwise loyal and/or disloyal with regard to said heritage. That is why Derrida's deconstructive work, patient and responsible, shows itself to be of utmost importance. This contemporary practice of attentive reading and rereading, hence at once loyal and disloyal, that consists in unearthing the strata of our cultural heritage, in disjoining its elements in order to understand how they fit together, allows one to open a space in the heart of this complex, otherwise. To the point of the possibility, or "the impossible", of an unforeseeable coming of the other, yet to come... *perchance*.

Thus, if phallogocentrism is a major theme of Derridean deconstruction, which questions and has an impact upon the tradition, this clearly stems from the fact that between a masculine presence and a feminine presence the imbalance is flagrant (within the tradition understood from philosophical, moral, sexual, fantasmatic, political viewpoints, and so forth). One may even go so far as to wonder whether *that tradition* was not in part *constructed upon and beginning with* a certain exclusion of the woman and of the feminine. The question remains open — and we're no longer at that point today. In this sense deconstruction reveals and questions a form of imbalance, it targets an appearance of abnormality.

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An obstacle within the tradition, because women seldom appear, seem never to appear *as such*. In *Politics of Friendship*<sup>7</sup>, Jacques Derrida presents a genealogical reading of the canonical model of friendship in circulation since Aristotle, by way of Cicero, Montaigne, Kant, Nietzsche, till even nearer to us. He makes it evident from this angle that the friend is always a man, never a woman, that friendship always concerns couples of men. The other forms of friendship, between men and women, or else between women, did not leave equally legitimate and exemplary traces within the system of authority and legitimation these great treatises constitute. Women remain

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié* (Paris: Galilée, 1994).

marginal, or even significantly eclipsed. Jacques Derrida picks up the thread of a certain model of friendship, the virile model of virtuous friendship thought out by Aristotle. Friendship par excellence, the highest form of friendship concerns men who have relationships of resemblance amongst themselves. As a result, these friends will have found themselves to resemble one another, in a non-fortuitous way, as "brothers". This then begs the question as to whatever became of the sister in this narrative, in other words the woman, the other of the male? One could say it is a question of democratic concern, in somewhat the same manner that today one speaks of "parity", that is, of a concern for equal representation of men and women in political assemblies. But the question is all the more of a democratic tonality that "fraternity" itself is naturally associated with the democratic ideal (as in the French motto since the Revolution: "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity"). Jacques Derrida points it out: "Rarely has democracy been determined without confraternity or brotherhood."<sup>8</sup> It follows that in the history of democracy, hence involving political stakes right up to the present day, preference will have been given to the phallogocentric model of the brother, native land, and the nation. Jacques Derrida observes that all the great philosophies of friendship — androcentric or androcentered — are intertwined with this political question. Thus, if men living democratically are like brothers, originally brothers of the nation or fatherland, all that seems to remain for women is the possibility of an assimilation into this model (but when?... I mean, since when and from what place does this problem arise? Since the liberation of women? The time of deconstruction, in "the library" and the world? Or else well before all that, as from the very beginning?...): the sister is a case of the brother, a species of the genus brother.<sup>9</sup> Is this andro-centered model suitable and adequate in order to think today about the citizenship of women at the heart of a political system, rigorously speaking? Jacques Derrida poses the question in this sense, inquiring: "what are we saying when we say *brother*?"

Concerning political thought with regard to the friend and the enemy, Derrida in this same book questions the thought of Carl Schmitt. Schmitt's main idea is that the political space opens up beginning with the moment one can identify the enemy. The real possibility of war is necessary in order for the political sphere to get organized. I shall not go any farther into Schmitt's thinking and the profound and detailed analysis Jacques Derrida makes of it in *Politics of Friendship*, but I shall quote a passage that seems to elucidate perfectly a certain general situation of traditional and cultural discourse. Jacques Derrida writes:

"Let's come back to Schmitt and give ourselves plenty of room. What a macroscopic view can put into perspective, from very far away and high up, is a

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<sup>8</sup> *Politiques de l'amitié*, p. 13

<sup>9</sup> Just as, in the French language, woman may appear as a species of the genus "man," the expression *les hommes* seeming to assimilate the totality of the human race, men and/or women.

certain desert. Not a woman to be seen.<sup>10</sup> A populated desert, certainly, a complete desert in the middle of the desert, and some will even say a desert pitch-dark with people: yes, but with men, men, men, for centuries of warfare and with suits, hats, uniforms, frocks, and with warriors, colonels, generals, guerillas, strategists, and with politicians, professors, theoreticians of the political, theologians. You'd search in vain for a woman's face, a feminine silhouette, and the slightest allusion to sexual difference."<sup>11</sup>

Carl Schmitt thinks out a world populated by men, without the presence of women. Whereas Plato, at least, made room in the ideal Republic for women as guardians of the city, Jacques Derrida notes that there is not even a woman soldier in Carl Schmitt. Granted, Schmitt is talking about the reality of war, and in point of fact women usually do not participate up front. For sure, but this is symptomatic: nor does Schmitt talk about the acts of resistance carried out by women in certain conflicts that took place in Europe. So the question arises: why is a certain reality of women's actions — moreover whether they be positive or negative — not taken into account by a theoretical discourse on war, acknowledged as worthy of reflection? One could say the same thing concerning friendship, reversing the deal: that the great treatises on friendship generally don't treat of friendship between women, or between men and women, doesn't mean these latter don't exist or never existed. It just needs to be recognized that the tradition which left a certain mark of authority in books conceals this aspect of reality, or in any case doesn't take it into account, as though it were insignificant.

Consequently one can better understand the meaning of deconstructive work. On the one hand, deconstruction is a questioning about an entire architecture of traditional thought: it analyzes the stratified structures forming the discursive element in which we think, namely with a view to permitting and opening other possibilities of discourse, of arrangement, which in particular aren't necessarily systematic in the sense of philosophical systems, closed upon themselves. Deconstruction is a reflection upon the system, upon the system's enclosure and aperture. Thus, if within the tradition that presents a certain systematicness of thought (for instance in the twofold opposition between man and woman), the political is firmly anchored in a phallogocentric propensity in books as well as in history — what can one do ? For Derrida it is about rethinking entities without any longer excluding. Here and now, it is necessary to invent other names, attempt to carry ourselves beyond these politics, in the hope and the dream that something new

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<sup>10</sup> In this day and age still in time of war, note that certain televised images surrounding the protagonists may give a similar impression, also varied depending on the context and the regions of conflict, to a greater or lesser degree...

<sup>11</sup> *Politiques de l'amitié*, p. 179

might yet come, occur... such as, for instance, "a democracy to come", to pick up on the title of another book.

Now I shall make two remarks on the topic of the deconstruction of phallogocentrism, in relation to the possibility of an aperture within the enclosure targeted by deconstructive practice. *Firstly*, in deconstructing traditional discourse, such practice leans heavily upon the analysis of masculine texts naturally bearing the imprint of phallogocentrism. This is the form of deconstruction previously observed: by analyzing the compressed strata locatable in this or that discourse, it is about opening up a space within the vault that might attest a certain concealment of women. *Secondly*, if taken under a certain angle the tradition tends to exclude women and femininity to the benefit of discourses of male dominance, this is more than likely linked to the fact that, throughout history, it is the men who have written the most. The desert of women in certain books is linked to another desert, that of women who write, talk, invent, and create with their women's voices and vision.

To finish up I shall illustrate these two points beginning with two texts: *Choreographies*<sup>12</sup>, an interview published in 1982 in the American journal *Diacritics*, and *Pregnances*, a book published in 2004, after the death of Jacques Derrida.

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In *Choreographies*, Christie V. McDonald asks Jacques Derrida some questions, evoking to begin the words of a maverick feminist, Emma Goldman (1869-1940), who addresses the traditional feminist movement as follows: "If I can't dance I don't want to be in your revolution." With similar regard for freedom and for dance, what concerns Jacques Derrida is the phenomenon of a women's liberation movement that would merely repeat history, a certain concept of progress and of history. Within this schema, within this programmed and programmatic line, nothing veritably new can happen, in the sense of something unheard-of, unforeseen, and truly alive: "everything would flow away, slip by, be swallowed up in this same river (homogenized, sterilized) of male history, with its old procession of reappropriation, 'liberation', autonomy, mastery, in short the procession of metaphysics and technics." Hence the risk is that feminism might model itself after the phallogocentric exemplar in an inverse manner, taking up again its norms and representations (and a "gynocentrism" of thought — I propose this term symmetrically — would follow after phallogocentrism, to go from one selfsame excess to another...). To a greater extent no doubt than many feminist women, Jacques Derrida is on the lookout for novelty, unpredictability,

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<sup>12</sup> Correspondence with Christie V. McDonald published in *Diacritics*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 12.2, summer 1982. French version in *Points de suspension. Entretiens* (Paris: Galilée, 1992). The text is available on the Internet, at the site *Derrida en Castellano*:

[http://www.jacquesderrida.com.ar/frances/derrida\\_choreographies.htm](http://www.jacquesderrida.com.ar/frances/derrida_choreographies.htm)

and surprise, in the image of the dance movement desired by “the maverick feminist” evoked at the beginning of the interview. He says so explicitly in these terms: “Who exactly is she [Emma Goldman]? Without having the context, I try to imagine what she wished thus to manifest.”

One understands that if Jacques Derrida refused in a certain measure the assimilation of his remarks with a feminist stance, it is insofar as he offered resistance to any phenomenon too commonly identificatory, fixed upon itself (and this is just as true in other contexts, for instance concerning the Jewish question), in which a space for the dance would be missing. Be it the dance *of* and *within thought*. According to him, this attitude is perceptible in a certain reactive feminism, which produces a repetition within the schema of continuous historical progress in motion toward great “autonomization” (a strongly metaphysical inclination of thought if ever there was one) — instead of seeking *to invent something else*. I shall quote another excerpt from the interview that expresses this idea:

“Perhaps the woman doesn’t have a history, not on account of an ‘eternal feminine’ but because one can, all by oneself, all by herself, resist, step aside (to dance, precisely) from a certain history in which one inscribes in general the revolution, or at least its ‘concept,’ history as continuous progress, despite the revolutionary split, history here directed by the woman moving toward reappropriation of her own essence, of her own difference, toward her ‘truth.’ Your ‘maverick feminist’ said she was ready to break, and first of all out of boredom and a taste for the dance, with the most authorized, dogmatic, and serious consensus since it claims to speak in the name of the revolution and of history. Perhaps she was also thinking of another history altogether, with paradoxical laws, non-dialectizable discontinuities, absolutely heterogeneous islands, irreducible singularities, unheard-of, incalculable sexual differences, women who went ‘further’ centuries ago, apart and dancing in a lone step, others who today invent sexual idioms apart from the great feminist forum, with a reserve that doesn’t necessarily prevent them from signing up and taking militant action on occasion. But I’m speculating. It would be better if I came back to your question.”

That question asked at the beginning of the interview was to define what “the woman’s place” could be. Now Jacques Derrida’s answer is that he would take care precisely not to seek to define such a place, as people traditionally have wanted to do moreover by assigning the woman’s place “at home or in the kitchen.” In the same way he says he does not seek to define a “concept” of woman; he doesn’t need one. Jacques Derrida steps aside from the essentialist metaphysical tradition that wishes to answer the question “*ti esti*”, “what is it?” He takes it upon himself to displace the question: “Why is it necessary that there be a place for the woman? And why only one, utterly essential?” On the contrary, it is about introducing a displacement into the very idea

of place, understood as essential as well as assigned. One must displace the places, change or transform the landscape and the traditional categories through which we think, or through which in any case men and women have thought for a long time (but who are – or *who is* – “the men” and “the women”? I’ve come round to this question asked in the introduction...).

This displacement operates in the deconstructive move put into practice by the reading and rereading of great texts of the past. But in the end, to end or to begin, in this whole story does the woman herself not have a word to say? I’ll come to my last point and the conclusion.

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The book *Pregnances* presents the situation of a woman painter, Colette Deblé, who brushes paintings inspired by great works of the tradition (photos of C.D.’s art appear in the second half of the volume). She mimes the history of painting while making visible a displacement, repeats the great representations of women by repainting them otherwise. In so doing, she is more or less ironical toward the phallogentric tradition, hence without being satisfied with “questioning” the tradition. She speaks through painting, images, and colors; Jacques Derrida speaks this painting with words. He thus takes on the voice of another, which he understands, but without substituting himself for it. In a way, a woman says of her own situation as a woman: “I have no history,” or “this version of history is not mine but yours... and I’m showing it to you, representing it to you after the fact, with other eyes, a woman’s eyes.” Jacques Derrida shows great refinement in this book, for instance when he speaks of the woman’s body proper (*corps propre*) but without saying what it is — using the double meaning of the word *propre* (that which is washed, cleansed or clear, and that which is appropriated, authentic, like the vision of a body that comes back to one-self).

“A wash [painting] not to announce one is going to wash up, of course drenching oneself with water, the story of women drenched in water with a view to reappropriating, putting on, but finally, the naked body, the true body, the woman’s body proper, clean (*le corps propre de la femme*).”<sup>13</sup>

*As though* outwardly the thinker wanted to wash the female body of certain stains of history, in search of *the body itself* but *for the other*, by fending off the contamination of the strange, foreign glance, that of the other, hence even his, through self-erasure. For to speak of the woman’s body proper, clean, without saying what it is, nor seeking to depict it, is to leave the other (*the otherwoman*) the freedom to see herself such as she does within herself. Finally. And

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<sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Pregnances*, p. 8

Jacques Derrida scribes and describes this invisible vision using a vocabulary deliberately chosen right down to the images, on the whole of feminine consonance.

“It’s full of proverbs, pieces of words, suspended outcries, echoes to inflect or let float. Made full like a pregnant woman or the cargo of a ship about to sail (*en partance*)...”<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps no philosopher or thinker shall have made this move before. In the past, they will indeed have said that the woman is this or that, that she is such and such, but the judgment often was made starting from the male model, by default in relation to it, through opposition (quite often negative) to it. However, or now: “a sex does not have an opposite, you see, there’s the truth, you have to know how to get used to it or handle it...”<sup>15</sup> That’s incredible when you think about it! Never will the woman have been asked simply what she herself might think of herself, how she might see herself, or even how she saw herself in the glance *of the male other*, good or bad (just as the question will end up being posed to know how men see themselves through such and such a feminine discourse and glance – *the man, the men, certain men...*). If the discourses *of the tradition* have spoken about women, it is almost only with a male glance and from the locus of a male utterance. Well, they came to be the authorities.

“Forget about the quarrel *she’s* picking with them (...), the quarrel *she’s* picking with the whole history of painting, with these painters’ patrons, with so many hands and maneuvers of men, with all these masters who have *set on stage and represented* (eclipsed, sublimated, elevated, veiled, dressed, undressed, revealed, unveiled, reveiled, mythified, denied, understood or misunderstood, in a word *verified*, it comes down to the same thing, in truth): the woman’s body. That *sustained* everything. Ever the female medium and surface, the female sex subject [one easily hears the echo that plays on ‘female sex object’], the woman will have been *their* subject, no, Colette Deblé’s, despite appearances.”<sup>16</sup>

In *Pregnances* and other books, in the days of deconstruction the words of Jacques Derrida *about the tradition* will have had to play in turn the authority’s role. To come therefore to circumvent legitimately the trend of a certain unique voice of authority — all the while keeping respect intact.

“Through the paternal memory’s onerous layers (at once Veronese, and Tintoretto, and Titian, and Rubens, and so many other leaders of schools,

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<sup>14</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 20

<sup>16</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 10

established showmen and directors), she sharpens an unparalleled vision. Never restoring [a work] when she sets it afloat again, tampering with the original (it's forbidden in museums but all it takes is for the guard to have his back turned)...<sup>17</sup>

The original. The woman's body proper, clean, at issue earlier, perhaps also her own manner of painting, speaking, or yet perhaps her *own* turns of thinking, dancing, living... *perchance*... Now I come to my conclusion.

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What will Jacques Derrida have done with regard to this old story of phallogocentrism, and what deeply thought-out desire shows forth therein? Desire to open a space, to make oneself available in order to let be, leave open a favorable space for a coming of the other. Or even *several comings*. He requests this plural advent, *yet to come*... He seeks to have women enter into the tradition, into philosophy, or even into the academic dictionary, beginning with the relevant fact that she appears to be excluded *as such*. A sort of imperious injunction, as much as a friendly and loving invitation so they will become, in turn and otherwise, equally legitimate and exemplary figures. And so, a question arises: if the woman tends to have been excluded from philosophy, eclipsed within the tradition in general, if she finds herself again in a position of relative exclusion *withindoors*, within "the library," whereas she indeed exists in *her outdoors*, in the world, and otherwise today than in the past, what is philosophy and what is the tradition? Or what shall they be once the woman in her name is therein reintroduced? If that which was excluded is reintroduced within what excluded it, what happens then? Will there still be "philosophy" ("metaphysics"), *the same one*? In its name, Jacques Derrida doubtless cannot answer. It would be necessary for Echo to take up again the words of Narcissus, appropriate for herself his saying in order to say something else, according to the story dear to Derrida present in *Pregnances*. The woman must answer for herself. Whether she thinks, paints, or writes, she must share her visions and words, her own, more and more. There shall never be too many plural voices. After which, too, one will be able to better envision this so-called "question of the woman," I mean its sense and pertinence, by better and otherwise turning round upon the past of her history, indeed of all human history, in the present.

"In this sense, one can see, through the murmur of these drawings, a gentle and disarmed critique of the sententious authorities who preside over the great historicizing histories of women, indeed of the representation of women, over the

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<sup>17</sup> *Loc. cit.*

great narratives perfectly sure of what these things are, history and representation, man and woman, and their stabilized apparition in a *picture*, without qualms about what the outline and color of a scene, myth, or story become when a woman figures therein other than as a figurant, when she takes shape therein or gives shape to, when she sees herself drawn or painted — or drawing or painting..."<sup>18</sup>

If one were to attempt to imagine the dream or musing upon it, what ideally would have been the thread to follow in order to accompany the contemporary departure from phallogocentrism? By not, or no longer, excluding her, but on the contrary inviting her to come, take back a place, *her* place, the one the tradition perhaps had refused her while developing itself into *that particular tradition* (the one that will have validated the phallogocentric model, the figure of the man, the brother, without valuing the sister if not reducing her to a brother, and so forth), it would've been necessary for the "philosopher" — the man in a sense representative of this tradition, affiliated with it while at the same time setting himself apart from it — to invite the woman herself to speak, of herself. That is what Jacques Derrida will have done through deconstruction.

Starting from the relevant fact that the tradition in part structured and built itself upon an exclusion of women and of the feminine, and deconstructing this history, he opens a space favorable to *the coming of the other*. By appealing *to the voice of the other*, he thus engages the *perchance* of a reorientation of discourse, history, and the tradition.

*"Another voice... May yet another voice come at this hour... an order or a promise, the desire for a prayer, I don't know... not yet."*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 13

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Feu la cendre* (Paris: Éditions des Femmes, 2001). An audio recording of the text read by Carole Bouquet and Jacques Derrida was released for the first time in 1987 and was re-released in 2004 as a CD (same publisher).

**P.P. : Feu ELLE**

**Son œil fend la Nuit. De haut en bas perce le voile d'Ombre qui la cache et la recouvre la pointe du regard aiguë précise. Le passage est frayé. Elle ira traverser cette fente incisée dans les apparences jusque là-bas de l'autre côté sa Lumière l'attend. – Rien ne pouvait la retenir dans cette aimance.**

**La chaleur touche sa main dans l'ouverture elle a passé une épaule sur sa nuque glisse la Lumière l'autre épaule est passée, puis son corps entier s'y réchauffe. De l'autre côté de la fente lumineuse elle s'y attise pleine positivité d'être à la ressemblance de son nom. « Elle » sonne et résonne dans le silence. Elle s'y engouffre entièrement elle y plonge elle s'y réfugie. Elle y brûle peut-être mais le Feu dans son esprit ne la détruit pas. Au contraire. Le Feu est elle, ils ne sont qu'une. C'est elle. Ou deux en une. Pourtant ce pouvait être un don.**

*Est-ce alors par ce Feu que tu as vu ? Comme si tu voulais sortir le monde de toi, le tirer à toi, le réveiller et toi du rêve d'un monde à moitié englouti que tu faisais, depuis si longtemps, trop longtemps ? Car après tout, qu'est ce que « le » monde ? Le tien, « ton » monde ? Et à qui appartenait-il lorsque tu as voulu le leur reprendre ?*

**Rendre “die Welt” à elle-même pour dire en le pensant que rien n'est plus pareil depuis.**