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"Create, she said.": Deleuze and Feminism (On Dorothea Olkowski's *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation*)

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In Dorothea Olkowski's *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation*,¹ the crucial importance of the work of art enters discussion many times, mostly around the work of contemporary artist and feminist Mary Kelly. In Kelly's *Post-partum Document*, the very question of "creation" is posed in the most striking and, perhaps, most obvious of terms: the creation of life itself.² The *Post-partum Document* concerns the artist's detailed rendering of the birth of her son and his early years of development. Here, we can already glimpse the relation of this act of creation, purely descriptive, with the creation of the child in the biological and physiological, as well as in the linguistic or sociological senses of the word. It is the limit where both senses of "creation" must meet and fold upon each other that Kelly's work interrogates and, in turn, that Olkowski demonstrates the importance of Kelly's art for the task of feminist philosophy that Olkowski aptly calls in her title "the ruin of representation."

3. Needless to say, "the ruin of representation" has been a central concern of feminist philosophy, or of the history of feminist thought more generally. Olkowski takes part in this critical tradition of feminist thought, which she rearticulates as the main objective of her project as well. In short, critical feminism has sought to achieve the ruin of an historically established representation of women and their experience by patriarchy, that is, a representation established by Man as the dominant subject of Language. And yet, as Olkowski immediately points out in her commentary on other contemporary feminist theorists such as Butler, Jardine, Mackinnon and others the project of critical feminism, in as much as it has exclusively concerned itself with the power of absence or negativity in representation, has also been haunted by a certain crisis that may be latent in the critical image of thought itself. In other words, no matter how far one goes *via* negativity, one finds within the order of representation itself the stubborn presence of a radical gap, or a *nothingness*. As Jacques Derrida has remarked many times himself on the limits of representation, or upon the limits of negativity, this *nothingness remains* "less than nothing and yet, to judge by its effects, much more than nothing."³
4. It is this stubborn and resistant trace of negativity ' which Lacanian theorist Slavoj Žižek has proverbially described as a "bone lodged in the throat" ' that often confounds any dream of restitution or recovery of substance or simple presence. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida writes:

The death of speech is therefore the horizon and origin of language. But an origin and a horizon which do not hold themselves at its external borders. As always, death, which is neither a present to come or a present past, shapes the interior of speech, as its trace, or reserve, its interior and exterior difference: as its supplement.⁴

¹Dorothea Olkowski, *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

²Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

³Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 314.

⁴Derrida, 315.

To remain with Derrida's argument for a moment ' not for long though; like Irigaray before her, Olkowski will not be content with this obsession "with death and mastery" and will seek to orient her thinking in a new direction ' this can be described as the that is limit internal to representation itself. It arises from the metaphorical slippage upon which the generalizing function of representation is founded, whereby death installs itself already or always already at the place of an origin that is twice inaccessible. From this we know that at the basis of the subject is "nothing," or rather, the "trace" of a founding act which has never been present *and nonetheless* institutes subjectivity in language. Consequently, since the supplement is neither a presence nor an absence, Derrida remarks in a line that precedes the above passage, "no ontology can think its operation."⁵

Concerning this process, Olkowski writes the following:

In the above passage, what I understand Olkowski to be suggesting is that the event of this "passive synthesis" must be opposed to the general symbolic logic of castration (the unconscious representation which circulates "emptily" through the structure-Other). This opens the possibility of singular deviations or differences that cannot be accounted for in the Lacanian schema, but only by folding these schema into the actualized in their living configurations 'like the mapping of the Lacanian mathemes onto the material objects, such as the swaddling clothes and fecal matter' as a result of which the living identity of castration, and of sexual difference, will always remain unequal to its abstract representation.

I would like to emphasize two words from this passage which I think are crucial to the context of our discussion: "strategy" and "avoidance." As Kelly repeats twice, her strategy is "to avoid" literal figuration, to "avoid" any means of representation that risks recuperation by a "natural" couple, to "avoid" the "body of woman" (either in image or in person), all of which are said to be "historical" in the sense that they participate in the problematic of feminism. Why are these words so crucial for the problem of feminism? On one level, the answer to this question is obvious. With the above mention of the term "avoidance" we are situated within the region of the Oedipus complex, and more specifically within its failure in the discourse of perversion, which Freud himself had highlighted under the gesture of "denegation" (avoidance, disavowal). Thus, Kelly herself situates the central question of the project around the possibility of female fetishism. "I would like to underline," Kelly says in her preface to *Post-Partum Document*, "one of the most central and perhaps most controversial questions this particular work poses in relation to the mother's desire: the possibility of female fetishism."⁶ With this statement, however, it is important to note that the notion of possibility is situated at the level of a problematic, and not immediately (or automatically) assigned a transgressive value as it has otherwise assumed in some early feminist works. In fact, Kelly seems to arguing just the opposite. In this sense, Kelly (the artist's) choice of subject could be said to be problematic, unless one already subscribes the question of motherhood as naturally belonging to her subject as woman. I imagine this is why Kelly underlines the controversial significance of her choice of subject matter, since it is precisely in the manner her subject can be represented (or rather explained) by Oedipus that raises the question of its political valence for feminism. And yet we might already note a crucial distinction that occurs in Kelly's is that this "avoidance" that she speaks of concerning woman or the subject of feminism already occurs at the level of representation 'as Kelly says, to avoid every means of "representation," to "avoid" literal figuration. Perhaps we might see this as an original anti-representational impulse that is also at the origin of the work of art, which produces its so-called de-realizing effects. But this is not necessarily so, since we also know of the de-realizing or non-representational power of male perversion (here I am thinking here of Freud's commentary on Di Vinci) in which the partial object (i.e., the missing

⁵Derrida, 314.

⁶Kelly, xix.

phallus) is precisely introduced as the element of fantasy that distorts the representation of the proportions of the prototypical object.

In fact, Olkowski asks concerning the impulse to define women's point-of-view in exclusive and oppositional terms, "is it by individuating women's point-of-view that liberal society excludes women?"⁷ Therefore, it is on the basis of this problem that Olkowski's shows that perhaps the most crucial problematics that remains at this stage of feminist thought, surprisingly enough, concern the encounter or confrontation between feminism and psychoanalysis, on one side, and with phenomenology on the other. However, as Olkowski cautions, this will not be achieved by a simple rejection or by an easy dismissal of responsibility to the history of both discourses' as Deleuze wrote in *Foucault*, "today we can no longer be content to say that the old struggles are no longer worth anything"⁸ but rather by a careful "working-over" and problem-solving approach, by the creation of a new conceptual language and schema for designating the sensible conditions of the subject of knowledge, perhaps in a manner that Mary Kelly's work has already demonstrated for us.

At the same time, as Kelly immediately goes on to say, "certain feminists began to worry about another kind of loss—the losing sight of the 'social,' in the end, failing to understand the political relevance of the personal."⁹ Olkowski recounts, almost twenty years later, that these concerns are still for the most part unresolved. Feminists have been worried about giving up too quickly the "molar identity" of woman (if, I might add, this loss was even materially or economically possible), and engaging in the creative process of "becoming-woman," which as we know from Deleuze and Guattari's description, also entails other *becomings*- (i.e., "becoming-molecular," "invisible" or "imperceptible"). Some have speculated that this could only lead to the worst of consequences, and Deleuze and Guattari themselves have often been suspected of a hidden motive, perhaps even for really being malicious and cunningly misogynistic. (As Alice Jardine once argued, maybe this is the ultimate trick that by introducing the notion of "becoming-woman" that feminists would unwittingly do themselves in and cause the social identity women to vanish through the looking glass just like so many Alices). The question of strategy therefore is also one of the most acute and critical questions that Olkowski takes up when it is properly understood in terms of a feminist practice, and not simply in terms of whether the theoretical work of Deleuze and Guattari is in any way useful or dangerous to feminist objectives (which is how it has been posed so far). The question is rather how to occupy, or rather move, between both levels at once, between what Deleuze and Guattari provisionally describe as the molar and the molecular. How to multiply or even to disperse "the feminine" without destroying or annihilating the possibility for the social and political subject of historical feminism.

Situating the above passage in the context of Olkowski's argument, if phenomenology does not confront the difference of "point of view" but rather baptizes a generalized and objective point of view that is impervious to the question of sexual difference, then would sexual difference then be the name of this force of exteriority, of this "Outside" that Deleuze recounts in the above passage? Would the thinking of "sexual difference" (the thought of the effects of sexual difference upon the organization of statements and visibilities, the thinking of feminist philosophy) not in fact have the greatest chance of entering into to break open the phenomenological subject, to re-open this ancient *polemos* which had been resolved or pacified too precipitously? And already, has not a feminist "point-of view" been most responsible for bringing this second figure of Being, this power-Being, most clearly into view? "From epistemology to strategy" 'would this not already be the slogan for much of feminist philosophy today?

⁷Olkowski, 10.

⁸Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 115.

⁹Kelly, xxiv.

The question, therefore, that Olkowski poses in conclusion is whether and in what way the principle of language as a dominant fold lead us to a solution of life or, finally, condemn us to a stale future where no ontology can operate and least of all, an ontology of change?

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5. 4. Derrida's last proclamation might be heard as a challenge (perhaps even as a condemnation) of one of the historical objectives of a certain tradition of feminist philosophy which has been impertinent enough to dream of such an ontology, an "ontology of change." As Olkowski writes concerning Irigaray's response to the above statement, "Derrida has posted the warning," and here I imagine the sign reads "NO TRESPASSING!" or perhaps, "NO ONTOLOGY POSTED HERE!" "Irigaray searches for an escape route."¹⁰ Responding to the same need to find a way out of this impasse, although perhaps more in the spirit of a Deleuzian "line of flight" as Joe Bousquet wrote, "I may be fleeing, but at the same time I'm looking for a weapon" we might understand Olkowski's strategic turn to the work of art to correspond with Deleuze's own emphasis on the work of art as most capable of engendering "the ruin of representation." Moreover, there is a significance in turning to Mary Kelly's work in particular; as Olkowski explains,

This is where the work of Mary Kelly comes into play, for it is both a critique of objectified representation and a creation of new points of view. Kelly's forms of expression are a new orientation in life for herself as a woman, an orientation she creates in works of art through the organization of images, objects, and words. [...] To see in Kelly's art not just a destructive force but also a creative force of difference, it might help to make sense of the difference between the logic of difference and the logic of representation.

6. Perhaps we can get a glimpse of this creative solution (or "ontology of change") most dramatically if we follow Olkowski's lead in situating the above problem announced by Derrida over against the objectives set out by Mary Kelly's work and beginning to work out the problem of representation from there. Such a contrasting view might be illustrative because, as Olkowski argues, it is precisely in the *Post-Partum Document* where the question of art itself is equated with the question of life and the value of life.¹¹ If "representation," (or "writing," in general) signifies the death of the object, its silent elision, or its evacuation (in favor of the materiality of the signifier), then Kelly's "representation" of her pregnancy and her child's first year of life would appear to be anachronistic, even fatal, to the supposed desire of the mother. Moreover, from the perspective of psychoanalysis, the question of the subject's desire (that of the mother, that of the artist) could be immediately placed like an ambiguous question mark around the process of creation itself. The question is whether this representation would entail a "becoming," or rather a "death" of her child? Yet, Kelly herself would object to most of these terms that, first of all, what she performs is "representation" and; second, that her child is an "object" that has fallen a certain distance from her body (in the psychoanalytic sense of the "partial object"), as a result of which her own desire can only be read through the punctiform event of castration (or separation) in which the art-work functions to fulfill the fantasy of restoring or recovering a lack in her own being. On the contrary, Kelly (the subject of the artist) is not attempting to represent or demonstrate the being of Kelly (the subject of

¹⁰Olkowski, 66.

¹¹Olkowski, 30.

the mother) in this process, which is doubled, but rather to strategically intervene in order to liberate both mother and child from the “Desire of the Other” (i.e., the Symbolic Order).

7. We might recall at this critical juncture, following a principle of actualization that Deleuze had earlier articulated in *Bergsonism* (1988), that the “rules of actualization are not those of resemblance and limitation, but those of difference and divergence and of creation” (Deleuze 97). Consequently, what is actualized in “the real” does not resemble or represent the bare possibility given by a structure or a code; Kelly’s diagrams therefore may have more explanatory power than the Lacanian schema which appear more like the sterile doubles of the living process she articulates because they are too abstract and must themselves be constantly be explained.

Kelly is obviously unwilling to accept the psychoanalytic interpretation and representation of her role, but she is no more willing to endorse and fall into line with the dominant reading of her work as ‘feminist art.’ She makes works of art that question the attribution of fetishism by taking it to its extreme in highly crafted, detailed, and precise works of art documenting specific moments of the child’s growth and her responses to it. She creates works that redefine the role of the mother, woman, artist, thinker, and member of society in terms of a new artistic sensibility that she creates by mixing the wound effected by the Lacanian schemas and the predefined placement of the woman’s body within in social hierarchy with her own deepening passive synthesis—that is, with the assiduous detail, the scientific mindset, the beautiful surfaces and constructions, the assemblage of words and images that make up her work, that form a mixture of bodies in tension with language’producing a continuous series of incorporeal transformations, the event of the new. (229)

8. Kelly herself addresses, more generally, the critical function of this strategy of representation in the following remark from the book-version’s preface: I would like to emphasize two words from this passage which I think are crucial to the context of our discussion: “strategy” and “avoidance.” As Kelly repeats twice, her strategy is “to avoid” literal figuration, to “avoid” any means of representation that risks recuperation by a “natural” couple, to “avoid” the “body of woman” (either in image or in person), all of which are said to be “historical” in the sense that they participate in the problematic of feminism. Why are these words so crucial for the problem of feminism? On one level, the answer to this question is obvious. With the above mention of the term “avoidance” we are situated within the region of the Oedipus complex, and more specifically within its failure in the discourse of perversion, which Freud himself had highlighted under the gesture of “denegation” (avoidance, disavowal). Thus, Kelly herself situates the central question of the project around the possibility of female fetishism. “I would like to underline,” Kelly says in her preface to *Post-Partum Document*, “one of the most central and perhaps most controversial questions this particular work poses in relation to the mother’s desire: the possibility of female fetishism.”[10] With this statement, however, it is important to note that the notion of possibility is situated at the level of a problematic, and not immediately (or automatically) assigned a transgressive value as it has otherwise assumed in some early feminist works. In fact, Kelly seems to arguing just the opposite. In this sense, Kelly (the artist’s) choice of subject could be said to be problematic, unless one already subscribes the question of motherhood as naturally belonging to her subject as woman. I imagine this is why Kelly underlines the controversial significance of her choice of subject matter, since it is precisely in the manner her subject can be represented (or rather explained) by Oedipus

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Perhaps this is why it seemed crucial, not in a sense of moral imperative, but as a historical strategy, to avoid the literal figuration of the mother and child, to avoid any means of representation, which risked recuperation as 'the slice of life.' To use the body of woman, her image or person is not impossible but problematic for feminism.¹²

9. Here we might conclude that the origin of representation itself issues from a certain form of "denial," of "deferral," of "difference" that installs itself socially and psychologically in the position of the male perspective, which has functioned both as a historical dominant and a categorical "point-of-view" at the basis of the regime of representation. *The male-fetishist, therefore, denies the moment of recognition precisely by means of a turn to representation, which is why feminism can and does pose the entire history of representation as in a certain sense masculine, in as much as the male-fetishist occupies one of the constitutive poles of the Subject for the normative hetero-sexual male.* " In other words, the male displaces or denies the lack in his own being, or, what amounts to the same thing, represents this lack in the position of an "other." Moreover, in as much as the missing object is also found in the world, it participates in the organization of reality, in the representation of every other object that will become located in its place, which are, so to speak, "made to order." This *informs* the structure by which the object is made to conform to this principle of hiding-showing (*aletheia*), or what Lacan once humorously remarked as the game of "hunt the slipper" (which, of course, is a pun on Freud's infamous comments on figuration in male desire as the "now you see it" and "now you don't" [*fort-da*] of the penis in the act of coitus). Therefore, so-called "literal figuration" is already pre-disposed to the imaginary in as much as every representation for the Subject is partially composed of this ghostly supplement, this figural dimension, and already in so far as the substance of the visible itself is already organized by a desire which, in itself most crucial aspect, represents the subject's denial of reality.
10. "In terms of representation," Kelly writes, "this denial is associated with a definite iconography of pornographic images where man is reassured by the woman's possession of some form of phallic substitute or alternatively by the shape, the complete arrangement of her body."¹³ Here, in this last statement, we can readily see the reason why Kelly would say that to "use the body of woman," if not impossible for feminist strategy, then is at least problematic, which also underlines the necessity and the historical critical issue for feminist iconography surrounds the different strategies of "avoiding" of this form of representation; specifically, the reproduction of its underlying masculine perspective or "point-of-view" that may be found to underlie

¹²Kelly, xxi.

¹³Kelly, xix.

representation in general (since all representation is perspectival). On a very simple level that this argument illustrates' perhaps some will say too simply' we might find this argument lays the groundwork, so to speak, for the question of "strategy" that Olkowski's book will take up and present as a crucial "problematic" (in the Deleuzian sense of this term) for feminism today. For Olkowski, this feminist problematic has the original impulse of an "anti-representation," or the ruin of representation. That is, this strategy involves constitutively ' not naturally, but symbolically, which is to say historically ' the avoidance of a structural perspective of "point-of-view" that first *en-genders* the entire realm of representation.

11. As Olkowski shows, Mary Kelly's strategic intervention into the field of generalized representation has two distinct aspects. First, Kelly avoids the traditional or generalized signs (like so many poses) catalogued by psychoanalysis for representing the feminine subject, and; second, Kelly makes each art-object "particular" to this or that woman, thus *creating* signs that are specific to this or that conversation between two women; that is, making each sign more particular (because limited to one instance) and, at the same time, more abstract (because singular and not capable of being generalized). In this manner, she steals (or rather steals back) the series of conventional images that continue to function in the representational or iconic language of advertising, in fashion magazines, or on the covers of popular romance novels. Although this has often been read by other feminists as a failed or unsuccessful strategy, "as representations of women trapped in misogyny and sexism" (Copjek), Olkowski argues that they can be read in terms of a more revolutionary ruin of representation, and not as a series of images and texts in which established verbal and/or iconic codes are fragmented," which often reproduces a complaint or resentment concerning the absent plenum or presence. On the contrary, Olkowski demonstrates that what is given in each image Kelly creates is "not an absence, but an intensification of images, the collapse of representation as generalization so as to make room for the emergence of this and that image, this and that particular field of light, the evidence of a life, the events of art."¹⁴
12. But at this point, I would like to interrupt my commentary on the more specific aspects of Mary Kelly's art in order to draw some general conclusions concerning what is being placed at stake here strategically by Olkowski's performance of the exemplarity of Mary Kelly's for a creative and vital feminist practice of engaging the "ruin of representation." Make no mistake about it! What is at stake is the ruin or the "emptiness" of the logic of castration, which the phrase "the ruin of representation" which was originally coined by Michele Montralay, really aims at. " What I am trying to portray, on the basis of my reading of Olkowski's philosophical intervention (as well as Kelly's artistic and critical practices), is the realization that feminism more than any other critical discourse that has emerged in the modern period (including psychoanalysis, Marxism, and semiotics which could be said to constitute its contingent or historical analytical languages) receives its most vital force of intervention from the problematic of representation. In fact, we could not think of any construction of "femininity" that does not find its critical force in a certain avoidance of the representation of "woman" (either in image or in person). How then does Olkowski articulate the strategy of avoidance?
13. First of all, in the beginning she avoids defining the one crucial question in terms of the *Look* (the gaze, or the male gaze). That is to say, she casts an indifferent glance back over the early stage of feminist discourse which concerned itself, not exclusively but certainly as a theoretical

¹⁴Olkowski, 72.

dominant, with the question of the *Look*, and which detailed different strategies of avoiding or denying the representation of women (either her image or her person) from the position of the male gaze. As Olkowski argues,

these analyses have operated with categorical generalizations: concepts neither abstract enough nor particular enough, which represent women merely in terms of pre-established, even naturalized, standards . . . , it hardly seems fruitful to continue down the path of generalized statements about objectified looking or about which social contexts women and minorities are not allowed to participate in. Such representations do no more than register a complaint against the norms of language, images, and social and political structures."¹⁵

14. It is here that we might seek to understand the affiliation (unnatural nuptial) which has recently occurred between feminism and the theoretical body of work by Deleuze and Guattari. In other words, the significance of their work for many feminists (including Rosie Braidotti, Camilla Griggers, Moira Gattens, Elizabeth Grosz, and Dorothea Olkowski, among others) perhaps has little to do with the so-called authority or representative value of their philosophy for feminism (an explanation which only repeats, in the most traditional sense, the history of philosophy as masculine). Rather, the attraction for these feminist philosophers has much more to do with a certain alliance that can be said to occur around the fact that, more than any other so-called modern philosophy, the work of Deleuze and Guattari is founded upon one of the most powerful historical critiques of both psychoanalysis and phenomenology. In other words, we might begin to understand this difficult association (or this "unholy alliance," as it is often characterized) by the historical convergence of two very different "problematics" (feminism and the philosophy of Deleuze-Guattari) around a common or shared antagonism with both "the philosophical history of the problem of vision" (particularly as it is posed by phenomenological discourse), on one side, and with "the institution of psychoanalysis" on the other'but also by the fact that each of these critical discourses share the same philosophical urgency concerning what Olkowski defines as *the ruin of representation*. However, to converge around the same problematic is not the same thing as to incorporate one representational system of concepts into another, or to invoke the authority of one philosophical system to secure the objectives of a second, and this is where the true sense of the "problematic" that the work of Deleuze and Guattari shares with feminism today usually gets lost; it gets lost precisely by treating this phenomenon purely in representational terms.
15. It is here that a historical tension can immediately be felt concerning the usefulness of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy for feminist strategy," which has been at the center of the feminist reception of Deleuze and Guattari, specifically around their concept of "becoming-woman." In other words, there has been a tension between what could be defined as the social and political interests of feminists, on one side, and the desiring interests of femininity, on the other, in as much as the latter has occupied a privileged theoretical position for the question of sexual difference. It is worth noting that it was precisely around this distinction that Kelly herself recounts the historical position of *Post-Partum Document* in the feminist debates of the 1970's and 1980's.

Instead [of the questions of the feminine as essentially transgressive, or the problematic of patriarchy] the question of representation was foregrounded. On the one

¹⁵Olkowski, 2.

hand, it referred to the ideological, that is, 'femininity' understood as the representation of difference produced within specific discourses, or social practices; on the other, it was used in the psychoanalytic sense as the representation of the drives with respect to aims and objects, that is 'the feminine' understood as the subject's position in language, symbolic castration defined as the representation of loss.¹⁶

16. Returning now to address the historical confrontation with phenomenology (that is, with the subjective fold of the visible and the invisible, with the very Being of representation), we must admit, that although the historical confrontation between feminism and psychoanalysis now has a long tradition and, in part, could be said to be a constant thematic within the discourse of feminism, the confrontation with phenomenology does not appear with the same degree of urgency in this very same history. For example, this confrontation is something that one can barely discern in Irigaray, but which Olkowski emphasizes to perhaps an even greater degree and brings to a critical articulation as one of the most crucial tasks that should be taken up by feminists today. The section I have been commenting on, "The Origin of the Work of Art," appears in the chapter titled "Against Phenomenology." Olkowski takes up a critique of phenomenology, which has been traditionally accused of being a masculine philosophy, by creating its "double." In a certain sense, in Olkowski's reading, Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* actually functions as the double of Merleau-Ponty's *Visible and Invisible* and, thus, Kelly's process strategically allows her to create concepts that will effect change in the phenomenological language of Merleau-Ponty. Concerning Merleau-Ponty, I will cite the following passage from Olkowski where her critique of phenomenology is extended and elaborated:

I would say that Merleau-Ponty's formulation of the question is caught up in a spatialization of the body . . . that materializes the body to the point of objectifying it. [. . .] What is needed is a schema according to which the seer is not just being-seen, the seer is the sight from the point of view of other seers, other worlds: sexual difference, the salvation on an intellectual level. This is the gap, the necessary interval, the third thing between woman and man. In this sense, the *chiasm* is not narcissism, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, for that comes to close to eliminating difference, unless narcissism can be radically re-configured as something creative. [...] Sexual difference remains in reserve, but, at least with the conception of the interval as a positive, creative act, such a point of view can be generated as a moment of freedom.¹⁷

17. What is critical for Olkowski's struggle with phenomenology is the question of "orientation," the logic of sense, which can be understood outside the question of sense that is already established by an order of representation. This goes hand in hand with the objective above of gaining access to a principle of creative individuation that is not already made or composed by fixed social and psychological schemes, hexagonal solids, hard bodies, static or "cold" identities. Here, the question of perspective, or rather "point-of-view," is as crucial to Olkowski as it was for Deleuze, particularly in *The Fold*. The question is "how do we look?" What is the form of vision and feeling that is not already reduced to the "subjective," to the "in there," which is opposed or appears over-against (*Gegenstand*) the world "out there"? This question is doubly important as well divided when it comes to representing the experience of women

¹⁶Kelly, xxiv.

¹⁷Olkowski, 87-88.

as different, yet already within the frame or scheme which reduces this difference to identity, that is, to the category of representation itself. It is around this question of orientation that Olkowski follows Deleuze's criticism of phenomenology for maintaining the last vestige of the scientific cogito, and thus perhaps for not being philosophical enough, for not achieving the purity of the concept of visibility without already reducing the visible to the infinite murmur of LANGUAGE.

18. Here, I can only point I can only refer to some very important pages of Deleuze's *Foucault*, from the chapter "Foldings, or the Inside of Thought,"¹⁸ where Deleuze outlines a more radical sense of *polemos* (war, conflict, struggle) which is the relation, or rather the "non-relation" between the form of visibility and the order of statements. In response, Deleuze charges phenomenology with, on the one hand, being too precipitous in folding the two forms into intentionality and, on the other hand, with "pacifying" this original and interminable struggle by "blessing too many things."¹⁹ Phenomenology ultimately moves too fast, according to his argument, and resolves this conflict too quickly. It pacifies the *polemos* or war between the visible and the sayable, between speaking and seeing, by folding one upon the other in a dominant fold of Language, on the one hand, or Visibility on the other. As Deleuze writes, "in Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, Light opens up a speaking no less than a seeing, as if signification haunted the visible which in turn murmured meaning."²⁰
19. Psychoanalysis, by means of its own conceptual language, discovers this same ghostly signification (the ghostly appearance of a Structure) whereby the visible is folded with a signification that "murmurs" a definite social meaning concerning the identity of the subject. (I have already outlined above the basis for the urgency of the critique of this signification.) At the same time, Deleuze writes,

This double-capture, which is constitutive of knowledge-Being, could not be created between two irreducible forms if the interlocking of opponents did not flow from an element that was itself informal, a pure relation of forces that emerges in the irreducible separation of forms. This is the source of the battle or the condition of its possible existence. This is the strategic domain of power, as opposed to the stratic domain of knowledge. From epistemology to strategy. This is another reason why there is no 'savage' experience, since battle implies strategy and any experience is already caught up relations of power. This is the second figure of Being, the 'Possest,' power-Being, as opposed to knowledge-Being. It is the informal forces or power relations that set up relations 'between' two forms of formed knowledges.²¹

20. In conclusion, I want to suggest to you that Olkowski's work represents a thinking beyond the enclosure of the "linguistic turn" that was inaugurating in different ways by Saussure and by the phenomenology of Husserl, Heidegger, and even Derrida who belongs essentially to a phenomenological tradition. This has been our critical tradition as well from which we have derived many of our concepts, but perhaps it has produced too many false ends and blind impasses. Olkowski calls attention to the problem of our dark precursor (language), from which the subject has been made, but also follows Deleuze project of a 'logic of sense' by signaling different precursors that fall to the conditions of the sensible. Thus, I have

¹⁸Deleuze, 108ff.

¹⁹Deleuze, 113.

²⁰Deleuze, 111.

²¹Deleuze, 113.

highlighted or underlined throughout my reading of Olkowski's questions concerning in what way we might understand "sexual difference" as yet another "dark precursor" which may still be on our horizon. As Olkowski writes,

Since woman and man cannot stand in for one another, since they are incommensurable (each being one angle of the *chiasm*) woman and man differ. The gap between them, sexual difference, which is not simply a void, does not and cannot seize something as its object, but as the site of life and language. That we do not yet have such a conception of sexual difference is evident even as we look for its 'strange advent.'²²

21. As Deleuze argued, it is "only through a stratico-strategic interlocking do we reach the ontological fold."²³ In some ways, this could be opposed to Derrida's earlier statement that "no ontology can operate" in face of representation. But then, perhaps the question of epistemology in Derrida is not strategic enough, not tied to a particular "point of view," but rather to certain general procedures and questions of "a general writing," of a "generalized procedure or operation of deconstruction" that define his own problematic. For Deleuze, on the other hand, the question of epistemology must become more modulated and historical: Not what can I know? But, "what can I know or see and articulate in such and such a condition for light and language?" Here, "the 'I' does not designate a universal but a set of particular positions occupied within a One-speaks, One-sees, One-confronts, One-lives."²⁴ Olkowski argues for the same position under the name of the "science of the singular," which could be provisionally defined as "knowledge" accompanied by "point of view." Here, the classical formation of epistemology is no longer possible or desirable in the Aristotelian sense. The general questions of epistemology are no longer adequate, since they refer to a general subject of knowledge. After all, who is "I" in the question "What can I Know?" Thus, the question of a feminist epistemology can be founded upon a new axiom: there can be no "general point of view," no general "subject" of knowledge that is not, at the same time, exposed to the critical limitation of perspective, or "point of view."
22. Of course, the word "*accompanied*" may not strong or forceful enough to account for the singular importance of "point-of-view" as a force of exteriority or a critical lever which enters into any general field of knowledge and begins to pose critical questions concerning how this knowledge would appear, or indeed be constructed differently, from different positions, points of view; in short, *the different "powers" of seeing and saying*. That is to say, it re-introduces *polemos* (strife, conflict, war) at the basis of the subject of knowledge, but more importantly it splits the forms of the visible and the sayable into two unequal parts—it causes language to stutter and the gaze to become blind—and more than any other historical subject of knowledge in the latter part of this century has caused both the forms of seeing and saying to undergo a strange kind of molting into something new, though still "obscure" as through a glass darkly. If feminism is exemplary in altering the question of knowledge today, it is because by means of this *polemos* it reintroduces the sensible condition of multiple "points of view." However, this cannot be understood as the simple pluralism of subjects, since the notion of pluralism is founded on the identity within the category of Subject, where real differences are exchanged for abstract qualities, predicates, or resemblances. In other words, the notion of "point of

²²Olkowski, 88.

²³Deleuze, 114.

²⁴Deleuze, 115.

view" cannot remain "abstract," since as Deleuze writes, "the abstract does not explain, but must itself be explained; and the aim is not to rediscover the eternal or the universal, but to find the conditions under which something new is produced (*creativity*)."

The notion of "point of view" that Olkowski employs throughout her argument, therefore, cannot belong to the order of representation; in part, she redefines the notion of perspectivalism through the philosophy of Bergson, in which the difference "between" multiple points of view must be differences in "kind" or "nature" (truly heterogeneous), and not differences in "degree" (i.e., as modifications of one subject or substance as in representation). Therefore, following Olkowski's argument, the exemplarity of a feminist "point of view" can only be understood under the condition of actualization (i.e., divergence, "*creativity*"), that other points of view which are actualized according to this principle will in no way resemble the "point-of-view" of women (in general) or can in any way be claimed as "identical" to the feminist subject of knowledge, that is, unless one wants to simply return to the old way of doing things and re-introduce a universal subject of knowledge in which the name of "woman" would indeed be the last name of Man.

Notes

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