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REVISIONS/REPORTS

Report from Paris: Women's Writing and the Women's Movement

Carolyn Greenstein Burke

The internal politics of the MLF (Mouvement de libération des femmes) often strike foreign feminists in Paris as fascinating and glamorous but Byzantine beyond belief. I became involved in some of its activities while teaching in the French university system during 1970–74, a period one might characterize as the first phase of the movement. When I returned to Paris last year, the long-smoldering disagreements within the MLF had finally erupted into an open crisis. Turning away from the activism of the MLF's beginnings (1970–71), many women were involved in an exhausting internecine struggle between two wings of the movement, others were off working on their own projects, and some had dropped out altogether. Many saw in the government's enactment of more liberal laws on contraception, abortion, and divorce an attempt to co-opt the MLF's most popular issues, and they pointed to the short life of Françoise Giroud's secretariat of *La Condition féminine* as confirmation of their suspicions. Serious commitment to change the lives of French women seemed to have fallen victim to the scramble for political positions in preparation for the March 1978 legislative elections or, in the view of the more radical, to have been a travesty from the start. Some women see in recent events a reaction to their increasingly vocal participation in French society, another face of social repression disguised as paternalistic benevolence. I began to wonder whether the ideological splits within the MLF did not reflect the political crises of the society in general.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the May 1968 revolt, which

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for many French women provided a first political *prise de conscience*. A number were university students then, active in the student *revendications* to emancipate the realms of both the imagination and sexuality from the repressive emphasis on the intellect. An ideological anti-Cartesianism went along with opposition to centralized, hierarchical authorities of all kinds. By 1970, many of these women were making the next step toward self-emancipation, most frequently in groups that would soon sever their connection to the *gauchiste* sects proliferating in the wake of May 1968.

From the start, the MLF has been highly articulate in its political analysis of women's position in society, but it has not, perhaps because of this, been able to establish a broad base of support. Its narrow appeal may also have something to do with the special rhetoric and style of the more prominent Parisian women, who tend to be well educated and politically sophisticated. Its relation to the highly political group of Paris intellectuals has always been problematic, and ideological struggles within the MLF often bear a connection to general intellectual currents in ways that seem incomprehensible to American feminists of whatever stripe. Moreover, when women with feminist concerns seek to work through existing institutions such as the universities, they tend to get caught in the meshes of the rigidly defined, hierarchically organized French government bureaucracy, to an extent that few Americans can imagine. The actual accomplishments of the women's movement in France are all the more striking when one is aware of the political situation and intellectual context in which, and against which, they occur.

I

It is possible to write one's self into existence in Paris, where *la parole* and *l'écriture* determine intellectual significance. Given the French tradition of philosophical speculation about language and linguistic structures, language is not simply a pragmatic concern. There is little evidence of an effort to make specific linguistic changes in order to eliminate sexist bias,¹ nor am I aware of any psycholinguistic studies seeking to examine men's speech for patterns of domination and control. French intellectuals tend to be less interested in language as the means of everyday communication than in its philosophical assumptions and implications. The central issue in much recent women's writing in France is to find and use an appropriate female language. Language is the place to begin: a *prise de conscience* must be followed by a *prise de la parole*. It is difficult to translate all the echoes of the phrase "prendre la parole"; "prendre le pouvoir" immediately comes to mind. *La parole* and its

1. No one seems concerned to abolish the distinction between "mademoiselle" and "madame," and coinages similar to "flight attendant" and "chairperson" are extremely rare.

cousin, *le verbe* ("the word," the Logos in the full theological sense), have been until recently the possessions of a small, well-educated male elite. In this view, the very forms of the dominant mode of discourse show the mark of the dominant—masculine—ideology. Hence, when a woman writes or speaks herself into existence, she is forced to speak in something like a foreign tongue, a language with which she may be personally uncomfortable. The acquisition of *la parole* causes one to question its implicit modes of shaping what one would like to say. Catherine Clément, for example, urges her contemporaries to "alter the realm of the imaginary in order to act upon the real, change the forms of language, which have, structurally and historically, been dominated by patrilineal law. Reflection on feminist practice brings into question, and into play, the transformational powers of language, its ability to stimulate change in ideological and economic domains."² She concludes with a call for the elaboration of a *langage des femmes* as the means to force a breach in the dominant masculine ideology. Language is a tool in struggle and a means to power in a culture which gives primacy to the word.³

Thus it is not surprising that so much energy has been devoted by French women to their examination of articulate discourse and their search for a women's language. The last few years have seen an unprecedented number of books, debates, even crises concerning what Hélène Cixous calls *la venue à l'écriture*: women's accession to the realm of an eloquent, forceful writing. Just below the surface of "venir à l'écriture" one hears "venir au monde": for many French intellectuals, to come into language is to be (re)born. Until one has acquired *la parole*, one cannot really claim to exist. But the problem is, of course, which *parole*, which *écriture*.

It is in this general political context and concern with women's language that the role of Editions des femmes must be evaluated. The publishing collective came into being in 1974 as the child of the psychanalyse et politique group, which, since its start in the early days of the MLF, had been concerned with the problematics of women and *écriture*. In a brief announcement in *Tel Quel* the group explained that the idea of a women's publishing collective grew out of their conviction that, "until now, women have written only with their bodies, through their symptoms, as, speechless and voiceless, they are censured by his-

2. "Enclave Esclave," *L'Arc* 61 (1975): 13; translation mine. Unless otherwise noted, all translations which appear in this report are mine.

3. Other women have begun to question the "objective," impersonal stance of the dominant discourse. They see such language as male defined: the label "impersonality" masks a male standard which favors the dry, the analytic, the "coherent." According to this view, such language is finally power seeking or phallic in its attempt to demonstrate "mastery" over its subject matter: a male action performed upon truth, which is always female. Intellectual impersonality is then the stylistic counterpart of "phallocentricity." One may guess that in the future this central question—the phallocentric assumptions of the forms of discourse—will continue as the focus of feminist *écriture*.

tory." In the wake of May 1968, they continued, "our revolt took possession of language." They proposed to create a space in which "the greatest number [of women] may write our particular place into history, from a base in common struggle." Members of the collective would share the work of reading, writing, editing, manufacturing, and distributing those works "which would most advance our revolutionary effort."⁴ Although there were within the regular commercial publishing houses a number of special series which brought out books of interest to women, *des femmes* was unique in its commitment to women's writing. Its appearance was greeted with hope and excitement in the women's movement.

However, it was apparent from a close reading of the *Tel Quel* announcement and from a discussion between members of *psychanalyse et politique* and Julia Kristeva in the following issue that *des femmes* would be opposed to works which their authors described as "feminist."⁵ The group clearly rejected feminism as "a position contained by the dominant ideology," one more in the series of reigning "isms," whether humanism, Marxism, or Socialism. In their view, feminists are reformists, caught up in the old system, to which they are merely seeking access. In this opposition of "feminist" and "revolutionary" lies the basis for the ideological split and the recent crisis in the French women's movement. *Des femmes'* opposition to feminism seemed to stem from both personal and political animosity toward the "feminists," who in turn came to see the collective's *prise de la parole* as a *prise de pouvoir*.

Although their publications are distributed in a wide variety of bookshops, with and without political definition, *des femmes* is most closely associated with the three bookshops of the same name, in Paris, Marseilles, and Lyon.⁶ Aside from providing a place for discussions, meetings, and exchanges of information, these shops make available for sale and for consultation a gamut of writing by women, except for those texts whose approach the collective sees as critical of its own work. Among the most popular of the *des femmes* writers are Emma Santos, whose books describe her "career" as a psychiatric patient in a patriarchal system (*La Malcastrée, J'ai tué Emma S., L'Itinéraire psychiatrique, Le Théâtre*), and Gisele Bienne, who has published novels of girlhood and adolescence in the provinces (*Marie salope, Douce-amère*). The collective brings out a number of translations: among the English and American writers are Charlotte Perkins Gilman (*The Yellow Wallpaper*), Juliet

4. *Tel Quel*, no. 58 (Summer 1974), in a special section entitled "Lutte des femmes," pp. 102–3. Both groups write their names in lowercase, to mark their refusal of essentialist definitions (e.g., "La Femme"), which seem to delimit women's experience.

5. *Ibid.*, no. 59 (Autumn 1974), pp. 19–24. See also discussion, "Féminisme ou lutte de femmes," in *Le Quotidien des femmes* (March 6, 1976), pp. 7–10.

6. Their books can be ordered by mail from the Paris bookshop: 68, rue des Sts. Pères, 75007 Paris.

Mitchell (*Woman's Estate* and *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*), Anaïs Nin (*The House of Incest, Winter of Artifice*), Sylvia Plath (*The Bell Jar, Three Women*), and recently Virginia Woolf (*Three Guineas*). They also publish books for young girls, in a series called *Du Côté des petites filles*, and plan a similar series for older girls, including comic books and a life of Georges Sand. The collective is especially pleased with its contacts abroad: they have already published studies of women's lives in Albania, the USSR, Italy, Argentina, and Algeria. This year they plan to bring out a collective work written by Latin American women, a bilingual (Arabic and French) edition of an illustrated history of the Saharan people, and a group of interviews with women in Brazil.

According to some women, *des femmes* has what amounts to a monopoly in the field of women's publishing. The collective's power seems excessive and its decisions frequently arbitrary. In the last year *des femmes'* practice as publishers has come under considerable criticism from other groups of the MLF as well as from some women whose books were first published by them. Opposition was expressed in what was probably the least appropriate forum (but perhaps the only one available), when their MLF critics sided with the woman who was to set up the Lyon bookshop in her subsequent disagreements with *des femmes*. Mutual antagonisms resulted in each side's taking a harder position. Once this situation had erupted into a series of suits and countersuits, recently settled in court to the detriment of *des femmes'* opponents, the women's movement in Paris had been badly polarized.⁷

At the height of the crisis, *des femmes* published *Histoire du féminisme français*,⁸ an unexpected act, given their ideological opposition to feminism as the double of the other "isms." However, they did not allow the authors to discuss *politique et psychanalyse*⁹ in their chapter on the MLF. In an editorial note signed by both *politique et psychanalyse* and *des femmes*, they explained that "our decision not to figure into this

7. The recent *Histoires du M.L.F.* gives one account of the gradual divergence between the various "feminists" and the *psychanalyse et politique* group. Many women feel that the cost in emotions and energies was far greater than the value of the issues involved in the lawsuits. Press coverage of these cases and the issues at stake was on the whole disappointing; however, see *Le Monde* and *Liberation* for May, June, and September 1977. A friend who herself teaches the history of women in France said, "If the publication of *Histoires du M.L.F.* had not sufficiently marked the end of the first, 'heroic' phase of the movement, these court cases have certainly done so. We have been forced to abandon the myth of solidarity, which may actually be more productive in the long run." See Anne Tristan and Annie de Pisan, *Histoires du M.L.F.*, with a preface by Simone de Beauvoir (Paris: Editions Calmann-Lévy, 1977). Note the authors' choice of names: Flora Tristan (1803–44) was a feminist and revolutionary, and Christine de Pisan (1364–1430) a poet and essayist often called the first French feminist.

8. Naité Albistur and Daniel Armogathe, *Histoire du féminisme français du moyen-âge à nos jours* (Paris: Editions des femmes, 1977).

9. The group appears to have decided to emphasize the *politique* by reversing its name and to express its opposition to humanist and feminist ideologies of capitalization.

history of Feminism is a deliberate political act: it is, however, necessary and useful to publish this passive text. Thus this history of Feminism limits itself to pointing out its other-opposite face, a tired Humanism, [a history] which, from its origin in the narcissistic language of the son (or the female son), acts as writing only to deny, repress, censure, and exploit that inaccessible place, no longer to be avoided, the mother's body." This elliptical statement, with its echoes of Lacan, concludes with the group's declaration of collective strength from within their own "lieu, imprenable." Perhaps a foreigner can only comment that this "imprenable space" often appears to represent a kind of literary and political hegemony, closed to outsiders and apt to describe personal decisions in ideological language.

II

At the height of the crisis in the women's movement (May 1977) the Italian Cultural Center organized a public debate on the subject of "women and creativity." Three Italian writers whose work had recently been published in French translation¹⁰ and three prominent French women, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous, were invited as panelists. Cixous chose not to participate because the organizers refused to invite the *des femmes* collective along with her. Thus one wing of the movement, of central importance in such a discussion, was pointedly absent from the meeting. Each participant gave a short talk, and no debate or exchange actually took place, partly because tensions were so high over the split between the hostile factions. The evening ended with a statement read by *des femmes*' opponents and the general breakdown of discussion.

In both their disagreements and similarities, the work of Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray illustrates the general concern with women's language: an analysis of their recent writing may help to evoke the intellectual climate in which the crisis erupted. Julia Kristeva's work is demanding because of her intellectual omniverousness and interweavings of different methodological codes (Marxist, Freudian-Lacanian, structuralist and poststructuralist, and anthropological, among others). Most notably since *La Révolution du langage poétique* (1974), her attention has been focused upon the literary avant-garde (Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Joyce, Artaud, Bataille), where she values the eruption of the "revolutionary": impulses which have long been re-

10. Armanda Guiducci, *La Pomme et le serpent* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1977), an analysis of cultural myths of femininity; Dacia Maraini, *Femmes en guerre* (Paris: Editions des femmes, 1977), a novel in the form of a woman's journal about her life in southern Italy; and Maria-Antoinetta Macciocchi, *De la France* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977), a political critique.

pressed by Western culture in the name of monotheism, capitalism, and their ally, the (super)ego. Kristeva's analyses emphasize negativity, transformation, and madness, the symbolic strategies of opposition to the monistic systemization of Western culture.¹¹

When asked in 1974, "In what way is your work 'that of a woman?'" Kristeva replied in *Tel Quel*, "Believing that one 'is a woman' is almost as absurd and obscurantist as believing that one 'is a man.' . . . Woman can not be subsumed under the category of *being*. . . . I understand by the term 'woman' that which cannot be represented, which cannot be said, which is outside of definitions and ideologies."¹² In her view, women's research can be only "negative," questioning the order of things, asserting that the female can never be defined: "La femme, ce n'est jamais ça." It should attempt to elude definitions and get beyond the rule of the Logos. She regards her research as that of a woman when she attempts to dissolve the very notion of identity (including rigid sexual identity) in order to liberate the force of an unrepressed sexuality in writing, as in society. But as this interview makes clear, Kristeva wishes to go beyond the notion of a woman's world as a separate cultural space, in order to situate the struggle in a wider context.

At this point, Kristeva too appears to reject feminism as a fundamentally unanalyzed view, caught in the concept of a separate identity and unaware of the nature of its relation to political power. (It is not surprising then that *des femmes* published Kristeva's *Des Chinoises* in 1974.)¹³ She proposes an alternative to feminism which would acknowledge our theoretical bisexuality, the self's "capacity to explore the entire range of meanings possible, including those which create meaning and those which multiply it, pulverize it, and make it new."¹⁴ We would then be in a position to uncover the repressed sexuality of signification. Kristeva's most recent work, *Polylogue*,¹⁵ a collection of studies of signification in language, literature, linguistics, and painting, performs the role that its author would assign to women: "affirming the right to difference, the return of negativity, calling in doubt political communities, divinities, authorities, even that sly one, the ego. . . ."¹⁶

In *Tel Quel*, volume 74 (Winter 1977), Kristeva inaugurated a new series of "recherches féminines" by women in various fields, whose ap-

11. For a lucid discussion of Kristeva's role in the elaboration of *Tel Quel's* ideology through 1973, see Mary Ann Caws, "Tel Quel, Text and Revolution," *Diacritics* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 2-8.

12. See n. 5 above.

13. *Des Chinoises* has been translated by Anita Barrows as *About Chinese Women* (New York: Urizen Books, 1977). An excerpt, translated by Ellen Conroy Kennedy, was first published in *Signs* 1, no. 1 (Autumn, 1975): 57-81.

14. Kristeva, in "Luttes des femmes" (see n. 4 above), p. 99.

15. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977.

16. "Des Chinoises à Manhattan," *Tel Quel* 69 (Spring, 1977): 11-16. This article is reprinted as an afterword to *About Chinese Women* (n. 13 above).

proaches link *écriture* and *politique*. The issue contains Kristeva's remarks on intellectuals as dissidents and her "Hérétique de l'amour," a piece on "that obscure place, . . . maternity," which juxtaposes a poetic intertext with an analytic study of the Virgin Mary. Kristeva concludes with the thought that the "heretical ethics" of motherhood must be reformulated if women are to find their own language. The editorial articulates the authors' common point of departure, "women's space," and points to the publication of texts which examine critical aspects of ideology and power. The series will combine close examinations of women's roles in different cultures with a commitment to social change, thus suggesting one way out of the intellectual impasse of women's writing in Paris.

Hélène Cixous seemed far less optimistic about the future of the women's movement or of feminist scholarship with a radical perspective. When I spoke to her last year,¹⁷ she thought it highly unlikely that any seriously critical current might emerge from within the French university system. Although a program in women's studies has been functioning at Paris-VIII (Vincennes) since 1975–76,¹⁸ she feels that research on women has reached a dead end largely because of the traditional, hierarchical university structures within which it takes place. In spite of serious interest among women students at Vincennes, she explained, government funding has not provided enough teachers, and furthermore the whole program, at master's and doctoral levels, has been approved on a trial basis only. For these and other reasons, Cixous has chosen to collaborate with the women of *politique et psychanalyse* and *des femmes*. Her students also participate in this phase of her activities, which she sees as the translation of theoretical research into practical application. She feels that their work together will continue, whatever happens to the program at Vincennes. Her criticism of many university women and feminists is especially severe. In her view, most professors are either *des femmes-alibi* (token women) or *des femmes classiques*, traditional women who teach courses with "women" in the title or describe their work as feminist without changing the way they live. She asserted that feminism in general and the "feminist" wing of the MLF are caught up in patriarchal ideology, that "their activities tend to consolidate the existing order."

Cixous's primary concern is essentially summarized in the incantatory opening of her essay on women and writing, "Le rire de la Méduse": "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing. . . . Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement."¹⁹ Her own writing, a sort of fictive autobiography and self-analysis, is concerned

17. Unless otherwise noted, quotations are from our interview of June 13, 1977.

18. The program was announced in *Signs* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 227–28.

19. Translated by Keith and Paula Cohen as "The Laughter of the Medusa," *ibid.*, no. 4, pp. 875–94.

with the psychic conditions that precede an *écriture féminine*. Her narrators speak in a “feminine” voice which aims to articulate bodily rhythms. Her more theoretical work experiments with a style written from its source in the maternal, in “mother’s milk.” In *La venue à l’écriture*,²⁰ Cixous, Annie Leclerc, and Madeleine Gagnon seek to evoke the ways in which women “come to writing.” All three agree that women’s writing proceeds from the body, that our sexual differentiation is also our source. In what she has described as a desire to “join their political struggle and practice,”²¹ Cixous began to publish fiction and experimental writing with *des femmes* in 1976. *Portrait de Dora*, based on the case of Freud’s famous patient, was published in 1976, after a successful run at the Théâtre d’Orsay. In Cixous’s perspective, Dora’s “hysteria” was a challenge to the patriarchal system and a source of renewal. The director, actresses, and author saw the play as a female enterprise growing out of their mutual readings of the script: “a woman’s text about women in which a woman speaks truly.”²² Cixous’s *Angst* (1977) is a novel composed in short, broken phrases which the author describes as “the blood’s narrative.” It aims to recount the voyage of a woman through the territory of psychic oppression in the name of love; the narrator relives her past experiences of love-as-death in order to go beyond them, into another realm—the radically different psychic space made possible, in her view, by the practice of the *des femmes* collective. *Angst* offers a way out of the psychological impasse of male-dominated culture; the novel is dedicated to “La Vivante,” and the postface explains that she is Antoinette,²³ the woman whose example has served to create this new realm for women and for their writing: “thought embodied, the reality of women.”

Luce Irigaray’s work is not well known in the United States, despite its significance in feminist evaluations of psychoanalytic theory. An analyst herself, Irigaray is also a sinuous prose stylist. Her most recent work, *Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un*,²⁴ weaves its way around the questions of female sexuality, psychoanalytic theory, and women’s language. Echoing back and forth, sections of the book create a chorus of female voices in a manner befitting the author’s evocation of mutuality in women’s experience and her desire to “have language stay close to the body.”²⁵ Irigaray’s sensitive poetic prose derives, perhaps, from her practice as a psychoanalyst, in which one must “learn to hear how women speak, first

20. Paris: Union Générale d’Editions, 10/18 series, 1977.

21. “L’Etrange traversée d’Hélène Cixous,” *Le Monde* (May 13, 1977).

22. Interview in *Le Quotidien des femmes* (March 6, 1976), p. 14.

23. Antoinette Fouques, a psychoanalyst, editor of *des femmes*, and a leading but controversial figure in the MLF since the beginning of psychanalyse et politique.

24. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977.

25. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from Irigaray are from our interview of July 7, 1977.

with an apparent mastery of intellectual discourse, sudden stammerings and silences, and then a simpler language, closer to bodily sensation." The more analytical essays clarify and extend Irigaray's examination of Freudian and Lacanian theories of female sexuality in her earlier work, *Speculum, de l'autre femme*.²⁶

While Lacan himself hinted at a "jouissance" (sensual pleasure/orgasm) beyond the phallic order, he did little more than tease his audience about the possibility.²⁷ *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* enacts that *jouissance*: in the course of miming the language of pleasure and creating another language in which female sexuality may at last be discussed, Irigaray undermines the structure of what Derrida, also critical of Lacan, calls our cultural "phallogocentrism."²⁸ Refusing any teleological patterning, Irigaray slips into unfamiliar territory in her rereading of Alice's adventures through the looking glass, or the mirror of language. She interrogates the Logos and uncovers its philosophical assumptions in order to pass through it, to "retraverser le miroir." Once in that other land, female reality is no longer "reflection" or absence, and this Alice finds herself at home. The book begins with "Le miroir, de l'autre côté," passes through the reigning conceptions (psychoanalytic, Marxist, pornographic) of women's nature, then emerges in that other country of women's own speech, "Quand nos lèvres se parlent." On the way, Irigaray invites us to desymbolize, to abandon any philosophy in which woman is seen as other, absence or lack, in order to be there where we are, in our own bodies.

Irigaray believes that women must first learn the "hard" language of philosophical discourse, then "derange" it, bother it, divest it of its power over us. Western culture is so totally saturated with the power of the Logos that a female mode of thought and writing embodying what we have always known with our skins seems of necessity to subvert the whole cultural enterprise, yet the tone of *Ce sexe* is not itself phallic, as words like "subvert" might suggest. It is precisely the phallic mode—seeking mastery of knowledge or of others—that her playful, elusive intelligence leaves behind, on this side of the looking glass. In *Ce sexe* there is no one dominant style, since the speaker seeks neither to dominate nor to be "one" (to provide the unified, authoritative point of view we expect in philosophical discourse). This text extends linguistic boundaries, stretch-

26. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1974.

27. *Le Séminaire, Livre XX: Encore* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975), p. 69. This passage is discussed by Jane Gallop in an article on Lacan from the perspective of his women admirers and critics, including Irigaray ("The Ladies' Man," *Diacritics* 6, no. 4 [Winter 1976]: 28–34).

28. On Derrida's coinage, see Gallop: "The composite word declares the inextricable collusion of phallogocentrism with logocentrism . . . and unites feminism and deconstructive, 'grammatological' philosophy in their opposition to a common enemy" (p. 30). It would be interesting to compare Derrida's "hymeneal" fable of the generation of meaning with Irigaray's "vaginal" one.

ing the reader's conceptual powers and loosening up the resistance of our language to a woman's perspective.

Following Irigaray's cue, one might interpret the recent crisis in the French women's movement as a symptom of the power of the Logos. In spite of our concern with creating a new, more suitable means of expression for women, many of us are still caught in the old analytic modes of thought in which ideological postures harden and rigidify. Intellectual women walk a tightrope trying to learn the dominant philosophical discourse in order to bring its assumptions into question. Regrettably, saying that women should see their sexual difference as a source of strength and write from their bodies does not always make this happen: much discussion of women's writing talks *about* the subject without managing to exemplify it. Since we are all caught in this predicament, the work of Irigaray, Cixous, and Kristeva illustrates the central issues not only in French women's writing but also in our own.

III

Although the crisis in the MLF has been a serious one, important work is being done in women's studies, but little attention has been paid to it.²⁹ Several studies with a feminist perspective have appeared recently: for example, the Presses Universitaires de France (PUF) brought out a collection of essays in the social sciences, *Femmes, sexisme et sociétés*, edited by Andrée Michel; Maspéro published Anne-Marie Dardigna's analysis of French women's magazines, *Femmes—Femmes sur papier glacé*. A surprising number of journals brought out issues on women: there appeared *Romantisme's* "Mythes et représentations de la femme" (nos. 13–14, 1976); the *Revue Française d'études politiques méditerranéennes'* study on women and politics in the Mediterranean countries (no. 24, December 1976); *Les Révoltes logiques'* articles on "Les femmes libres de (18)48" (no. 1, Winter 1975) and the Saint-Simonian women editors of "La Femme libre" (1832–34) (no. 5, Spring–Summer 1977); an issue of the *Revue de critique communiste* on feminism, the family, and sexuality; and even an issue of the traditional law review *Droit social* on women and social law (January 1976). In addition to the special issue of *Tel Quel* already mentioned, this year will see the publication of a number of studies of women's work in nineteenth-century France in *Le Mouvement social*, a journal of social history. This brief list may suggest something of the range and variety of recent studies of women and culture, as well as the extent to which the women's movement has influenced left-wing circles.

29. I am indebted to Jeannine Verdes-Leroux, a sociologist at the National Research Center (CNRS) for much of the information which follows.

In the universities, however, the situation of women's studies is problematic. Few centralized listings of university programs are available, and the very rigid and hierarchical organization of university departments often makes it difficult for such interdisciplinary approaches. A partial list follows.³⁰ At the University of Provence (Aix-Marseille-I), courses in women's studies have been offered since 1973–74, chiefly through the departments of history and sociology. The Centre d'Etudes Féminines, inaugurated in 1976, coordinates research in women's studies on both the master's and the doctoral level. At present, women are doing research on such topics as women and the Fronde, women and the revolution in Marseilles, French women writers in the nineteenth century, and social workers in military hospitals and private enterprise. At Dijon, through the departments of political science and law, master's and doctoral level courses have been offered since 1974–75 ("Women: Power and Society," "Women in History," "Images of Women and Social Reality," "Women and Culture"). At the University of Tours, under the direction of Madeleine Guilbert, a sociologist, a number of *troisième cycle* doctoral theses have already been completed, on women's work in agriculture and in the PTT (national postal and telephone-telegraph service), and group studies of unemployed women workers and women in apprenticeship are in progress. Guilbert will soon bring out her own annotated bibliography on women and work in France.

In Paris two divisions of the University of Paris have been active in women's studies. At Paris-VII an open interdisciplinary *groupe d'études féministes* has been meeting since 1975; the research seminar (master's and doctoral levels) has focused on French women in the nineteenth century, with special emphasis on women as domestic, office, and factory workers. At Paris-VIII, the department of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies offers courses on ideology and literature in France and the USSR, as well as a research seminar. A number of courses have been given through the sociology department, one ("au sujet des femmes"), by the department of psychoanalysis, where Luce Irigaray taught until 1974,³¹ and several by the departments of English and French. Students can earn a special *diplôme d'études approfondies* after five years in the women's studies program directed by Hélène Cixous.

At this writing, it is difficult to evaluate the progress of women's studies in France. Aside from the fact that there are very few centers or programs of women's studies per se, uncertain funding, opposition at the top levels of the professional hierarchy, and the centralization of policy decisions in the Ministry of Education all make it difficult for

30. For some of the information on women's studies and feminist courses, I am indebted to the anonymous article "Universités: Recherches sur le féminisme," in *face-à-femmes Alternatives* 1 (June 1977): 138–39.

31. See *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, p. 161, for Irigaray's account of her dismissal.

French women in the universities to institute programs in a permanent way.

IV

In place of a conclusion, one may point to some new beginnings. Now that the myth of a single, united women's movement has been shattered, women's concerns are finding many different forms of expression. A number of feminist magazines and bulletins are struggling to keep appearing, with limited financial support. Among the more recent are *L'Information des femmes*, a monthly publication providing a women's calendar and reports on activities in France and abroad; *Nouvelles féministes*, the information bulletin of the Ligue de droit des femmes (concerned with women's legal rights); *Sorcières*, a magazine of women's writing; and *Questions féministes*, a journal of feminist theory published by the new women's collective Editions Tierce. Along with these journalistic ventures, another women's publishing project was being discussed when I left Paris in late 1977. Women editors from major publishing houses were meeting to organize as a collective. "Collaborators rather than competitors," according to the first draft of their joint announcement, they see their role as women writers' advocates and advisers, and they aim to create a climate of greater respect for women's writing.

Finally, one should mention two recent initiatives within the MLF. Not far from the Bastille, a group opened their *espace-femmes*, a center for exchanges of information, meetings, social activities, and support for all women, whatever their affiliation. About the same time, in June 1977, an international women's meeting organized by the *lutte des classes* (Trotskyite) group drew a crowd of 5,000 women for three days of meetings, study groups, and exchanges with other women from Third World countries. Participants came from twenty different countries and included all political tendencies within the MLF and many women with no particular ideological commitment. From now on, *Le Monde's* reporter asserted, women will no longer need to fear expressing their disagreements in public.³² That serious disagreement can now be acknowledged may point to the real strength of the women's movement(s). The feminine "imagination" may choose *not* to take power but to find or create spaces in the social fabric where something radically new can be said and done.

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32. "Sous le 'continent noir' de la condition féminine;" *Le Monde* (June 1, 1977).