

Preface

In the mid-19th century, the French historian, Jules Michelet, noted categorically: “L’Histoire, que nous mettons très sottement au féminin, est un rude et sauvage mâle, un voyageur hâlé, poudreux; Nature, est une femme.”¹ Man is history, or more precisely: man *makes* and *has* a history, while woman *is* nature. Since then, history has ceased to be a coarse savage man, a tough, grimy traveller across the centuries. The fact that women are present and represented in history, that women write history, that gender relations have made inroads into the hallowed departments of general history, that historiography is no longer presented as a musty, dusty affair – all this we owe not least to the American historian, Joan W. Scott. She was presented with the 1999 Hans Sigrist Prize in Gender Studies, awarded by the University of Berne, Switzerland, for her work. This volume documents the speech she made, as well as further contributions towards the symposium on “Gender, History & Modernity”, on the occasion of the award ceremony.

Among social theorists, Joan W. Scott is one of the key figures in historical gender studies. Her work on women’s living and working conditions during the Industrial Revolution not only laid the foundations for a social history of women, but also furnished vital insights into the social history of Europe. In her proposals for a concept of *gender*, she formulated the theoretical basis for the evolution of women’s history into gender history; she introduced innovative methodologies and ventured into new fields of research. Joan W. Scott’s trenchant discussions of the potential and necessity of historiography contributed towards gender studies and historiography that are committed to continuous, critical self-reflection.

Joan W. Scott’s contribution to the 1999 Symposium, reproduced here both in the English original and in German translation, is informed by her academic and sociopolitical commitment against biological determinism – the musty topos that is two centuries old and keeps recurring in debates on the social place, and the social existence of women and men. The encomium by the philosopher, Rosi Braidotti, is an appreciation of the sociocritical potential of Joan W. Scott’s studies, the successful marriage of historical precision and intellectual imagination that is essential for a history of the present. Francine Muel-Dreyfus’ contribution shows the usefulness of the category of *gender* to political sociology, while

Claudia Opitz traces the reception of Joan W. Scott's theoretical and methodological studies in the German-speaking world. The volume concludes with a bibliography of Joan W. Scott's work.²

In 1996 Joan W. Scott published a study on the relationship of French feminism and human rights, entitled "Only Paradoxes to Offer". By reconstructing the history of 19th century French feminism via exemplary case studies, she questioned those interpretations of modern democracy "that attribute earlier exclusions to temporary glitches in a perfectible, ever-expansive pluralist system".³ The title of Joan Scott's book is a quotation from Olympe de Gouges, who restrained herself from arguing any further in order not to be condemned "comme une femme qui n'a que des paradoxes à offrir, et non des problèmes faciles à résoudre". The first of the four case studies is dedicated to Olympe de Gouges. Scott demonstrates how the paradoxical shifts of feminism between equality and difference are related to the paradoxical foundation of modern democracies. The double paradox lies in the fact that "historically, modern Western feminism is constituted by the discursive practices of democratic politics that have equated individuality with masculinity".⁴ As we all know, this equation has had far-reaching consequences. In the modern Republican Age sexual difference became the central difference before all others – be it religion, class, even nationality. After the French Revolution the difference drawn along this equation condemned women to political non-existence. In the words of Germaine de Staël: "Depuis la révolution, les hommes ont pensé qu'il était politiquement et moralement utile de réduire les femmes à la plus absurde médiocrité." Madame de Staël was a woman of transition, making strategic and risky use of her membership of various social categories, consciously oscillating between her rank of noblewoman and being an independent spirit. However, if a woman not only held but also published her own opinion, an opinion that ran counter to orthodox thought, she had to fear ridicule in monarchies and hatred in republics, to use Madame de Staël's words: "dans les monarchies elles ont à craindre le ridicule, et dans les républiques la haine".⁵ In republics it became paradoxical (and even dangerous) to be a woman and not only to argue but also to act in public like a man.

If a woman nevertheless dared to enter the masculine terrain of political, social and philosophical debates she was said – like the early sociologist and feminist philosopher, Jenny P. d'Héricourt – to be discoursing in the "style of the beard". In other words, someone who did what men did – who wanted to *have* an opinion and wanted to *make* history – could not be a woman. D'Héricourt recognised this

insidious trap as early as 1850: she adamantly rejected the attribute of the bearded-masculine style (and existence). For a woman to accept the "compliment of being a man" from "vain and insolent men" would mean to submit to the "superiority of the male sex".⁶ In doing so, however, d'Héricourt insisted on the paradox – in the eyes of her opponents – perceived by her very existence, and turned the philosophical challenge back on them.

This is also where the paradox described by Joan W. Scott is situated. It is a paradox that has been inherent in and driven feminist thinking from the start: that it is impossible to protest against the exclusion of women from society and politics without returning to gender differences and to "women" – creating precisely the difference that in fact needs to be overcome. Reading Joan W. Scott also teaches us, however, that – from a regretful "only paradoxes" – the paradox of feminism can be turned into a proud "only paradoxes". By linking feminist arguments with a discourse on human rights, Joan Scott has not only used the past to illuminate the present, she has also disentangled the paradoxes of feminist thinking – not to resolve them, but to pave the way for a search for even more paradoxes. Paradoxical feminism leads us to the paradoxes of modernity. Long before cybernetics and system theory found paradoxes to be more inspiring, less boring and less lulling than mainstream thinking (doxa), Kant said: "Therefore, it is a risk to hold a view which conflicts with public opinion, even if it is deemed to be reasonable. [...] Boldness [of a paradox] does not lie in running the risk that the view is untrue, but rather in the risk that the view might be accepted by only a few. [...] Opposite to the paradoxical is the commonplace, which sides with the general opinion. But with the commonplace there is as little safety, if not less, because it lulls the mind to sleep, whereas the paradox awakens the mind to attention and investigation, which often lead to discoveries."⁷

The category of *gender*, introduced in the early seventies by Ann Oakley to eliminate biologist simplifications and generalisations from social sciences,⁸ did not in the least resolve the paradox of feminism and modernity. On the contrary: the paradox has been obscured by the success of this category in all disciplines of human and social sciences as well as in everyday and political speech and thinking. *Gender* was intended to clarify matters and to transcend paradoxes. Perhaps this is precisely why *gender* meanwhile has often come to be associated with an almost sexless, ahistorical, apolitical, positivist correctness, which is no more than pure incantation. Feminism, however, is still entangled in what Joan W. Scott has termed the "politics of undecidability" – the necessity of enduring the paradoxical simultaneity of sameness and difference. The general usage of a category, however,

which conceals ambivalences and contradictions, not only has an effect of reification but one of “pacification”. More attention, more research is required to understand the paradoxical structure of modern gender structures and social conditions. New discoveries may result from such studies.

It is this kind of research that will benefit from the money that comes with the Hans Sigrüst Prize. We therefore give thanks, first and foremost, to the past and present Presidents of the Hans Sigrüst Foundation, Prof. Andreas Ludi and Prof. Bruno Gottstein, as well as to all the Board Members of the Foundation, who accepted the challenge of awarding the 1999 Prize to Gender Studies. In Switzerland, this field has seen much research but is scarcely institutionalised. May it benefit from the platform offered by the award ceremony, the Symposium, and the financial support granted to this publication.

The international search for a nominee was conducted by an inter-disciplinary committee from the University of Berne, consisting of professors Margaret Bridges (English Lang&Lit), Verena Niggli (Medicine), Silvia Schroer (Theology), Brigitte Studer (History) and Doris Wastl-Walter (Geography), and presided over by Claudia Honegger (Sociology). Caroline Arni organised the symposium and was in charge of publishing these proceedings. Barbara Lischetti, Secretary of the Hans Sigrüst Foundation as well as Head of the Equal Opportunity Office at the University of Bern, and her scientific assistant, Chantal Magnin, gave their full support to the entire venture. Finally, we would also like to extend our thanks to all the international experts involved in the nomination process.

Claudia Honegger & Caroline Arni

Aus dem Deutschen übersetzt von Margret Powell-Joss.

Notes

- 1 Jules Michelet, quoted after Roland Barthes, *Michelet*, Paris 1954, p. 130.
- 2 We regret that temporal constraints compel us to forego the publication of an article by Luisa Passerini. Her excellent contribution to the symposium was a talk, “Parallel Lives”, about two women (J. W. Scott and L. Passerini herself) from the same generation and sharing the same profession, but from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
- 3 Joan W. Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer. French Feminists and the Rights of Man*, Cambridge/London 1998, p. 18.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 5 Germaine de Staël-Holstein, *De la littérature* [1800], in: *Œuvres complètes*, 3 vols., Paris 1861, vol. 1, p. 302.
- 6 Jenny P. d’Héricourt, *La femme affranchie. Réponse à MM. Michelet, Proudhon, E. de Girardin, A. Comte et aux autres novateurs modernes*, 2 vols., Brussels/Paris 1860. On d’Héricourt, who is not discussed by Joan W. Scott, see Caroline Arni, *Femme sociologue – femme diable. Jenny P. d’Héricourt, eine frühsoziologische Denkerin im Frankreich des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Bern 1998, as well as Caroline Arni & Claudia Honegger, “Jenny P. d’Héricourt (1809–1875). Weibliche Modernität und die Prinzipien von 1789”, in: Claudia Honegger & Theresa Wobbe (eds.), *Frauen in der Soziologie. Neun Porträts*, Munich 1998, pp. 60–98.
- 7 Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, translated by Victor Lyle Dowdell, revised and edited by Hans H. Rudnick, Carbondale/Edwardsville IL 1974, pp. 11–12.
- 8 Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society*, London 1972.