

# The Pain of the Text — Anger:

## Intertextuality: Gender

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Genres are not to be mixed.

I will not mix genres.

I repeat: genres are not to be mixed. I will not mix them.

Jacques Derrida

from "The Law of Genre"

Another title to this paper could be *Towards Theorizing the Textual Politics of Anger*. In Christine Delphy's *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*, a collection of essays and pamphlets have been gathered together for an English-speaking readership, with "anger" as one of the primary objects of study. This text engages with textual compositions of parody and polemic, using these genres to sustain the excesses and distortions of anger; anger directed by "feminist" interests towards rupturing the organic unity of hegemonic and monologic discursive practices. For liberal and marxist feminist criticism, reformative and revolutionary impulses within the confines of language may find their semantic constituencies in these licenced and diverse forms of stylistic revolt. But while these forms may intoxicate us with their barbed wit, humour or public and discursive antagonisms, cynical undertones, and mythical inversions, an important question emerges for political action as to whether these negative liberations from the fetters of discursive solemnity can be politically directed, or put another way, whether these disruptive forms of cultural reform or revolt can be bound appropriately to a widely based political practice of transformation.

Delphy writes against the grain of a particular authoritative discourse aiming her critical artillery at the haunting spectre of a scientific-Marxism. What was once an authoritative style travelling smoothly through the legitimated avenues of an institutional hierarchy, becomes in the hands of Delphy a vehicle for a violent intertextual clashing of gender, and even, genre differences; however, Delphy's violent reaction against this methodology and its mode of development does not attempt to efface its presence, nor to rewrite the

coherency of its monologic practice, for a residue or a trace necessarily remains as the source and motivation for Delphy's anger: the dominant phallic and masculine style remains *sous rature*, under erasure, simultaneously present but absent. The result of these discursive antagonisms rubbing against each other introduces a "dialogic angle" into the text and here, Bakhtin is useful. As Bakhtin characterizes parody against stylization, and I think the same can be said for Delphy's polemics,

"the author . . . speaks in someone else's discourse, but in contrast to stylization parody introduces into that discourse a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one. The second voice, once having made its home in the other's discourse, clashes violently with its primordial host and forces him to serve directly opposing aims. Discourse becomes an arena of battle between two voices" (Bakhtin, 193).

The patriarchal or phallogocentric host and its "feminist" parasite intermix, generate and breed a peculiar discursive monster; the mismanagement of the gender and genre "purities" of phallogocentric discourse and the permutating influences of feminist criticism in their grammatological fusion produce a set of dystopic anomalies: "an internal division of the trait," as Derrida writes in "The Law of Genre"; "impurity, corruption, contamination, decomposition, perversion, or degenerescence" (Derrida, 1980, 57/58). "Degeneration" usually evokes a threat of loss, a steady decline of life forces. It also designates a transformation and metamorphosis, a degenerate vitality that is not, as Derrida writes elsewhere, "a lesser vitality; [the degenerate] is a life principle hostile to life" (Derrida, 1982, 27).

The double-directed voicedness of the dialogic imagination motivated by a degenerate vitality does not embody the desire for annihilation; quite the opposite, this writerly textuality is an attempt to survive, but at the cost — and to some an acceptable one — of a psychic division of labour and internal cultural dismemberment. As Artuad writes, "I am not dead but I am separated."

I want now to turn to Delphy's text and consider the internal divisions of the trait that manifest in this text as the result of middle-class white women who remain discontently entangled within the cultural hegemony of predominantly white, bourgeois and phallogocentric apparatuses of power. As well, I want to consider the effects of discourse produced by critics who submit to a politics of subordination and in so doing, suffer a psychic division that may allow them to "survive," but only within the limits of a phallic masculine economy where certain "freedoms" are granted in order to allow the overall co-operation of the feminist movement.

## The Pain of the Text

The following discussion of Delphy looks first at her textual antagonisms within structural-marxism — the battle against what Nietzsche called the “mobile army of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms” (see Derrida, “White Mythology,” 217) that constitute the unmovable and sacred truth-value of phallogocentric discourses — and secondly, at the degenerate vitality of Delphy’s pained text with its inverted *jouissance* and sadomasochistic negation of the body, desire and fantasy.

The method of analysis deployed throughout Delphy’s text belongs improperly to structural-marxism; against the cool sobriety and polished neutrality of accepted or legitimated discursive formations of which structural-marxism would be considered a legitimate, if not dominant discourse, Delphy uses or rather abuses this methodological approach and its attendant logocentric scientificity. Of her own particular appropriation of structural-marxist principles, Delphy says the following by way of defining her methodological parameters:

The explanatory power of a theory (or concept or hypothesis) is tied to its capacity to find what is common to several phenomena of the same order, and hence to its capacity to go beyond the phenomenal reality of (i.e. what is immediately present in) each case. The belief that the reason for the existence of things is to be found beyond their appearance, that it is ‘hidden’, is integral to scientific procedure (though it can, of course, be contested). . . To understand is first to compare. This is how all sciences proceed, and it is how we proceed in everyday life: how you and I describe a person, a place, a situation, to people who are not able to have direct experience of them (Delphy, 21/22).

Delphy’s application of the scientific method is closely based on Althusser’s re-writing of Marx’s study of political economy into a science. In response to my aligning Delphy with Althusser, her own text clearly repudiates this allegation: “It is therefore strange to see some ‘marxists’ (like Louis Althusser) rehabilitating the notion of Science and laying claim to an absolute truth, but this time for marxism. . . But it [this process of rehabilitating] is more than contradictory, it is disquieting, because the pretension to universality, to the absolute, is precisely the mark of intellectual products coming from dominant positions” (156).

As if Delphy's own notion of "science" resembles an open-mythology, where fictions retain their fluidity and refuse to slip into the confines of closed systems, becoming models for regulations and principles, and structures of belief, and Althusser's appropriation of a scientific methodology represented just such a closed mythology, Delphy's textual practice marks this distinction with an insignificant and marginal use of a capital "S" to signify the closed version as opposed to the open. With no further explanation, Delphy's text appears to perversely forget itself in its automatized and traumatized overflow of Althusserian rhetoric. This uncontrollable mechanical-overflow in Delphy's textuality marks a moment of excess, and excess of awareness of the weight of authoritative discourse. But Delphy's attempt to plant anti-tank traps in the way of the rumbling and creaking invaders of our minds succeeds in an exponentially powerful deployment of their rigidity. The following quote, taken from her comments on gender in which Delphy discounts feminist analyses of sexuality and the body, represents a good example of discursive dis-appropriation: "I start from the incontestable fact that they are socially named, socially differentiated, and socially pertinent, and I seek to understand these social practices."(24)

Delphy marks her point of origin in the singularity of her existence — "I start" — and addresses the universal and absolute truth of "incontestable fact" in reference to the sexually undifferentiated, hermaphroditic unity of the "they" — the objects of her scientific study, i.e. women. I requote Delphy's critique of Althusser: "But it is more than contradictory, it is disquieting, because the pretension to universality, to the absolute, is precisely the mark of intellectual products coming from dominant positions" (156). The contradictions in Delphy's text between her discursive practice and her theoretical "beliefs," her negation of the specificity of women's sexuality and her critical positioning of authority in herself as author and origin of thought, constitute an excessive distortion in the text which perversely forgets itself; at the same time as the analysis argues against dominating discursive formations, the self-same discursive strategies are being deployed. We could find more than one interpretation in the final clause of this quote, where "the mark of intellectual products coming from dominant positions" presents itself in Delphy's text, not as a threatening sign of power and knowledge but rather as a result of the scars and schisms produced when one not only *comes from* dominant positions, but attempts to *come out* of them as well.

The initial effect of these distortions of which I have only provided a small sample here, evoked in this reader anger and resistance. I'm resorting to a "personalized narrative" to explain my reaction, not that my "I" is simply the only "I" I inhabit, or that there exists a direct relationship between the "I" of the text and the body that writes, in which I am, if anything, othered from myself by the process of writing — and this text, *Close to Home*, is one that others me radically; closes me off from myself. I feel shattered and torn apart, my sensibilities waver between extreme intensities of a dynamic affirmation and a militant, aggressive repulsion. I have, I confess flung this text across the room, battered and abused its cover, perhaps because it hits too close to home.

Against Barthes' notion of the pleasure of the text, in Delphy I am confronted violently with the pain of the text. Her text positions me as victim, oppressed, full of hatred and self loathing, alienation, guilt and paranoia. I resist this positioning — and not surprisingly! For all the adjectives I can compile this position is, in the end, a totalizing one. In the diversity of social experience that women inhabit there is pleasure, there is pain, and, in between these simple marks of opposing psycho-physical experience, there exists a range of language and knowledge too manifold to record here. And even if I could catalogue an encyclopedia of socio-sexual experience, it would still remain insufficient, as a body of knowledge for totally and finally describing its 'objective' — to place parenthesis, closures around the beginning and end of a notion of (women's) experience.

A lot has been made of this notion of *jouissance* that Barthes develops in *The Pleasure of the Text*. As Gayatri Spivak describes it with regards to desire in writing: "thought, as *jouissance*, is not orgasmic pleasure genitally defined, but the excess of being that escapes the circle of the reproduction of the subject" (Spivak, 259). For women not to be reproduced as victim-subjects, then, we must move — excessively and perhaps degeneratively — beyond this position; one way to do this is through *jouissance*, the other, as Delphy's text suggests, is through anger and pain, a degenerative vitality. Delphy locates an escape for women's victimage in the *jouissance* of violent excess — anger. But this re-reading of *jouissance* in terms of a militant excess perverts our common understanding of *jouissance*. Instead we now have a sado-masochistic (in)version of *jouissance*, where power(less)ness, its humiliation and degradation, are amplified by the sado-masochistic sexual/textual practices that fuck back with all the intensity with which the subject initially internalizes her victimage and self-hatred.

To speak of *jouissance*, either in its narrowest sense — “orgasmic pleasure genitally defined” — or its broadest sense in relation to ontological and epistemological affirmations of desire, and keeping in mind that the split between these definitions of *jouissance* is a slippery one, is to speak of the body. For Delphy the body is a non-issue, or at its best, second on the hierarchy of relevant theoretical issues to the exploration of women’s *productive* capacity:

The control of reproduction is both the cause and the means for the second great material oppression of women — sexual exploitation. Control of reproduction is the second facet of the oppression of women. Establishing why and how these two forms of exploitation are affected and reinforced by each other, and why and how both have the same framework and institution, the family, should be one of the primary theoretical goals of the movement (74/75).

Delphy defers a discussion of the re-productive-body and marks with the categorical imperative “should” its necessary inclusion within the exclusivity of her own text. A gracious gesture or a rhetorical gesture? The deferral of the body as a legitimate site of theoretical speculation is, perhaps implicated in her (in)version of *jouissance* as a deferral of pleasure. The only notion of the body Delphy acknowledges is the bio-body:

but the role that biology never merited historically it does not merit logically either. Why should we, in trying to explain the division of society into hierarchical groups, attach ourselves to the bodily type of the individuals who compose, or are thought to compose, these groups? The pertinence of the *question* (not to speak of the pertinence of the replies furnished) still reamians to be demonstrated so far as I am concerned (23).

Within the theoretical home-base of Delphy’s framework, the bio-social or socio-sexual body has no room.

The absence of an analysis of power and the body in Delphy’s theoretical project and the absence of *jouissance* in her discursive practice as a way of dismantling the negative effects of power on the body are related to another theoretical exclusion. In her concluding essay, Delphy refuses psychoanalysis and the thematics of sexuality as proper objects of material analysis. The exclusion of sexuality from a materialist analysis that, for Delphy, would bring about the “revolution in social reality” necessary in order to bring about the further “revolution in knowledge,” [Delphy, p. 218] entails a denial, not only

of sexuality, but also desire and desire on the level of the imaginary. Delphy explicitly critiques "fantasy" as an unacceptable method of "escape" from the self-hatred incurred by women's oppression:

Women, like all oppressed people, hate feeling they are women, because we, like all human beings, hate feeling oppressed. This is a major obstacle to women getting involved in the women's movement, because to join in the fight is to recognize that one *is* oppressed, and recognizing one is oppressed is painful. For many women, the only possible mitigation of the oppression they endure consists in fantasy, in a denial of this oppression, since they cannot escape it in reality. This denial leads to a refusal to accept the relevance for them of the feminist struggle (146).

Delphy's refusal of 'fantasy' and, implicitly, its material manifestation in cultural productions such as those of the Harlequin romance variety, signals a deeper problem within Marxist criticism. The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins has engaged in a careful confrontation with Marxism, pointing to its inability to approach culture from anything but an instrumental or functional position. As Sahlins writes, "The historical variability of the cultural order was the problem to be explained, and in the attempt it was in a double sense transferred from the subject of explanation to the predicate" (Sahlins, 128). By the very philosophical structure of Marxism, Sahlins explains how the symbolic order could only ever be under socio-economic subsumed concerns, which, for Marx, determine the symbolic system. Putting aside the applicability of Sahlins' work to an overall critique of Althusser, the more immediate applicability to Delphy's work interests us here. Delphy's refusal to confront this impasse in Marxism within the terrain of sociology leads her to take up a negative view of cultural apparatuses. For Delphy, the idea of a systematic deconstruction of conventional romance or adventure narratives, in a genre such as the Harlequin romance, would prove subordinate to a consideration of the socio-economic determinants of publication or distribution, for example. We might go further and consider the work of Julia Kristeva and her study of the symbolic order, her obvious Maoist persuasion and attention to Chinese women as constitutive of a predominance of cultural politics in France, generally. In relation to this predominance in French feminism and the work of Kristeva, Delphy's work appears to us as strictly anomalous. I make this remark only to suggest one way of situating Delphy's work in relation to other work in the area of feminism produced in contemporary France. We may also understand Delphy's dismissal of psychoanalysis and the constitution of women's

subjectivity as further related in this context to the political differences between Kristeva and Delphy.

This particular theoretical exclusion also informs the discursive effects of Delphy's writing style. In denying fantasy (i.e., transgressive forms of subjectivity, pleasure, desire, the body) Delphy's textual practice produces a compensatory aesthetic in the form of a hyper-rationalized prose.

The combined effects of Delphy's hyper-rationalized prose, her relentless use of logocentric terms such as formal, legitimate, logic, systematic, reasoning, etc., the contradictions in her critique and appropriation of scientific theory, and her over-worked political vocabulary contribute to a representation of a bourgeois woman's oppressive reality, and result in a highly intensified reality-effect. Delphy pushes to the limit, the threshold, the notion of a purely objective, empirically observable and yet, totally biased reality. This intense representation of the real does as much to efface fantasy, subjectivity and fiction as it does to bring to the forefront an indisputable Medusa-like truth discourse — ugly and grotesque in its painful and angry descriptions and certain to paralyze or grip the reader with fear if faced head-on. Delphy de-sensitizes her discourse; its lack of metaphorical play, its refusal of the body, fantasy, pleasure and desire, and in so doing, her textuality evokes the living death or nightmare of a particular kind of oppression. This is the text's strength.

Delphy's text deploys anger and hatred, empowering women with a destructive energy and vitality. Whether this is an effective strategy for unifying all women regardless of sex, class, and race differences in order to bring about a revolution is questionable. According to Delphy, anger is a vital component of revolutionary practice:

Contrary to what is thought, it is not easy to be, and above all to remain, angry. . . It is the railing which prevents us tipping over on to the side of the institution, to the side of our oppressors. . . But our only weapon against the potential treason written into our status as intellectuals is precisely our anger. The only guarantee that we will not, as intellectuals, be traitors to our class, is our awareness of being, ourselves, women, of being among those whose oppression we analyze. The only basis for this consciousness is our revolt; and the only foundation for this revolt is our anger (153).



So much anger becomes disturbing and threatening, threatening to the possibility of women also experiencing pleasure and joy, though Delphy would argue that our fundamental oppression virtually makes that possibility unachievable.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, according to Julia Kristeva, the suppression of *jouissance* in feminist revolutionary practices, leads inevitably to a complicity with the father in their mutual desire to deny the mother's *jouissance*. In *About Chinese Women*, Kristeva assesses the notion of an Electra complex, characterized by "masochistic *jouissance*":

The Electras — deprived of their hymen — militants in the cause of their fathers, frigid with exaltation — are dramatic figures where the social consensus corners any woman who wants to escape her condition: nuns, 'revolutionaries,' 'feminists' (Kristeva, 25/33).

With so much frigidity and deprivation, the proliferation and productivity of revolutionary political and discursive practices would appear impossible.

Kristeva's evaluation of feminist and revolutionary women as masochistic imposes a homogeneous representation on women, women who cross the thresholds of gender and genre boundaries. The benevolent mother of *jouissance* Kristeva speaks of is the mother of virgin births, who would never permit a corrupted form of generation or the "odd couplings" of separatist-feminism (both anti-patriarchal and anti-capitalist) and phallogentric discourses in the same way Delphy's text facilitates these degeneracies; for only through a process of invagination could the illicit intermixing and mixing of genre/genders occur. The revolutionary degenerate, then, is not deprived of her hymen forever, as Kristeva insists, but rather, I would suggest that it is this benevolent mother, the feminine law of regulated and pure births, who stands in the way of change.

The degenerative vitality goes against the grain of a benevolent *jouissance* which is the utopian rupture of playful revolt, the *jouissance* of the carnival. As Terry Eagleton says of the carnival, "its affirmation image rests upon [a] potentially crippling sublimation of the drives necessary to achieve it in practice" (Eagleton, 149). Delphy's attempts to elicit anger from otherwise quiet and comfortable sources in order to motivate feminist movement appear utopian and redemptive in comparison to the lived experience of an anger and hatred lodged in the painful memory of past abuses; it is this memory of anger which refuses

to allow feminism to become the utopic redeemer of the future and to forget this anger, the anger experienced by many women on the margins of Delphy's readership, would be to cut off the feminist movement's greatest strength; anger that stems from the memory and daily experience of oppression is nurtured, as Benjamin says of the oppressed workers, "by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren" (Benjamin, 260).

The monologic and anti-feminist representation of Kristeva's benevolent mother, against Delphy's denial of the body, including the mother-body, and her warrior-like strategies, could leave us stranded in a waste land of irreconcilable oppositions, if it weren't for images like the eroticized mother-warrior, allegorized in tales such as Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber." In Carter's image mothers do not have to be told to save their daughters with all the codes of patriarchy and continue to endorse those subordinate values. In the following passage, a mother sweeps in, in white charger fashion, to rescue her newly-wed daughter from a misogynistic and sadistic husband, who has tortured all his previous wives to death:

You never saw such a wild thing as my mother, her hat seized by the winds and blown out to sea so that her hair was her white mane, her black lisle legs exposed to the thigh, her skirts tucked round her waist, one hand on the reins of the rearing horse while the other clasped my father's service revolver. . . without a moment's hesitation, she raised my father's gun, took aim and put a single, irreproachable bullet through my husband's head" (Carter, 39/40).

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