

Year: 2004

**More sociological than the sociologists : undisciplined and  
undisciplinary thinking about society and modernity in the nineteenth  
century**

Arni, Caroline and Müller, Charlotte

Posted at edoc, University of Basel

Official URL: <http://edoc.unibas.ch/dok/A5256449>

Originally published as:

Arni, Caroline and Müller, Charlotte. (2004) *More sociological than the sociologists : undisciplined and undisciplinary thinking about society and modernity in the nineteenth century*. In: Engendering the social. Maidenhead, S. 71-98.

© 2004. Reproduced with the kind permission of Open University Press. All rights reserved.

# Engendering the social

## Feminist encounters with sociological theory

*Edited by  
Barbara L. Marshall and Anne Witz*

### 4 More sociological than the sociologists? Undisciplined and interdisciplinary thinking about society and modernity in the nineteenth century

*Caroline Arni and Charlotte Müller*

The gendering of modernity as a masculine 'affair' structures and organizes discourses on modern society from their very beginnings. In this chapter, we present two social thinkers of the nineteenth century who entered neither the sociological tradition nor the history of the discipline, and who were excluded not only for being women, but also for contesting the organizing principles of emerging sociological discourse. Both Harriet Martineau (1802–76) and Jenny P. d'Héricourt (1809–75) pursued a genuine feminist interest when they analysed the exclusion of women from 'modern society' as a social, not a natural, fact and made gender a category of analysis. And in doing so, they widened the analytical scope of the discourse on society before it gained its form as a masculinized discipline. Our interest in Martineau and d'Héricourt goes beyond exposing the singularity of two particular women. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the gendering of modernity through emerging discourses of the 'social' and to draw attention to the way in which, from the very outset, feminists contested the masculine character of these discourses.

#### **Gender as a category of social circumstances: Harriet Martineau and the analysis of modern societies**

If a test of civilisation be sought, none can be so sure as the condition of that half of society over which the other half has power . . . The Americans have, in the treatment of women, fallen below, not only their own democratic principles, but the practice of some parts of the Old World.

(Martineau 1837: 156)

The Englishwoman Harriet Martineau (1802–76) might be seen as the ‘first sociologist’ (Rossi 1973) given that she not only astutely analysed modern society as it was developing, but was also a successfully published, feminist social scientist. Martineau, who from the 1830s was able to live on the royalties from her publications, was an extremely versatile and productive author who worked in diverse fields and formed opinions in disparate disciplines: of particular note here are her religious papers and papers which criticize religion (for example, Martineau 1822; 1830), her educational advice (for example, Martineau 1849), her historical writings (for example, Martineau 1849–50), her political statements and comments (for example her contributions in the *London Daily News* between 1852 and 1866) or her literary essays aimed at both adults (for example, 1839) and children (for example, 1841). But it is her extensive sociological works that allow us to distinguish her from other successful nineteenth-century female authors, for it is here that she produced writings that pose genuine sociological questions and spark empirical research. Posing the question of how societies can be analysed and understood ([1838] 1989) led her to develop an original method and set up methodological principles to govern research into social reality. She did not stop at simply reflecting on research strategies, however, but applied these empirically to actual societies asking, for example, what is the relationship between theory – the promises of equality – and practice in American society (1837)? Elsewhere – in a cross-cultural comparative study – she looked at socio-historical and religious lines of societal development (Martineau 1848). In these works she always connected micro and macro sociological perspectives. For example, while micro sociological field studies shed light on the reality of life for women servants (Martineau 1838–9), Martineau recognized the ubiquity of unequal social relationships such as those of class, sex and race which framed them. Thus, contrary to the position taken by those recognized in the mainstream as the ‘founding fathers’ of sociology, inequality is not principally or solely the expression of class relationships, to which further inequalities, such as the relationship between the sexes, is subordinate or even naturalized. For Martineau, social antinomies are grounded in the relational ‘circumstances’ of individuals, and not in their psycho-physical, biologically determined dispositions. She explicitly criticized the insistence of her contemporaries on the ‘all-pervading power of natural predispositions’ as speculative, going against the ideas of the Enlightenment and progress and, due to its typifying effect, as an ideological instrument to ensure patriarchal hegemony. In her sociological writings she investigated the background to these ‘circumstances’, the consequences of different socialization processes and a politics of inequality derived from self-interest. As we will show, Martineau developed a consistently sociological approach in her writings, and even in the early stages of the discipline of sociology as we now know it, she generated central sociological concepts which remain valid today.

### Biography and publication

Authorship has never been with me a matter of choice. I have not done it for amusement, or for money, or for fame, or for any reason but because I could not help it. Things were pressing to be said; and there was more or less evidence that I was the person to say them.

(Martineau 1877: vol. I, p. 188)

Harriet Martineau, born 1802 in Norwich, is a ‘typical daughter’ of the Age of Enlightenment which, in England, was predominantly characterized by the concepts of utilitarianism and deism. Belonging to a quite liberal and tolerant middle-class English family, brought up as a Unitarian, she received a remarkable education even in subjects that were not typically taught to women.<sup>1</sup> A sickly child, she was mainly taught at home by her elder brothers and sisters. Supplementing this ‘unformalized formal’ education with an intense self-study of several economic, political and theological theories, she was able to acquire a relatively diverse and extensive knowledge. Her father’s occupation as a manufacturer meant that Martineau had a fairly comfortable childhood. After his death in the 1820s the family became impoverished and Harriet Martineau was left to rely on her own resources. At this time she started writing and publishing: first novels and stories.

Her transformation into an author who was respected in broad circles came with the publication of her popular writings on economics: *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832–4), and subsequent works, prompted by politicians, on the revision of the poor law (1833–4) and the revision of taxation law (1834). Her decision to make the ‘laws’ of political economy, which formed the theoretical frame of reference for her middle-class lifestyle (at least until her father was ruined as a manufacturer), accessible to the uneducated classes was rooted in the direct observation of social tensions in the wake of crude, boom and bust Manchester capitalism, as well as in her own understanding of the writings of Jane Marcet (Martineau 1877: vol. I, p. 138) who, in the early years of the nineteenth century, produced a much respected essay in the form of a mother–daughter dialogue which addressed questions of political economy (Marcet 1816). In her *Illustrations*, Martineau gives us well-founded, didactically constructed short stories. The plot around which she wove her historical and internationally based stories was taken directly from the works of the political economists – Smith, Bentham, Ricardo, Malthus and John Stuart Mill. She packaged their central ideas (the utilitarian principle of the maximum benefit or the ‘holy dogma’ of the ‘greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people’) in short stories on subjects such as the principles of political economy, capital and labour, population growth, finance and free trade, as well as addressing the poor laws and taxation law (Escher 1925; Orazem 1999). Her interest as a

didact and communicator was at the forefront, as a broadening rather than a (critical) deepening of an enlightened education. Despite a negative prognosis for the success of her plans (Martineau 1877: vol. I, p. 169), Martineau made a commercial breakthrough with her *Illustrations* (Hoecker-Drysdale 1992: 33f). Her uncritical attitude to the core tenets of political economy brought her lasting recognition among broad sections of the population, including the political classes and contemporary authors in political economy. The acid-tongued critic of political economy, Karl Marx, clearly preferred to ignore her contributions by pouring his biting scorn on her in a brief aside (Marx 1975: 664).

After completion of *Illustrations*, Harriet Martineau decided to take an enjoyable and relaxing journey to America. En route she started to pull together methodically reflected ideas about 'how to observe' any society. She spent two years in America, where she tested her empirically orientated ideas. On her return from the United States she reported her observations in *Society in America* (1837) and in a shortened, more popular version in *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838). In the same year, she published her principles and methods of empirical social research in *How to Observe Morals and Manners* ([1838] 1989).

In 1851 she began a translation of Auguste Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive*, aiming to win recognition for Comte's ideas. Following on from her earlier project, of popularizing the theories of the political economists and thereby enlightening broad sweeps of English society on the conditions and laws of societal development, the systematic grounding of science in the *Cours de philosophie positive* appeared to her to be the appropriate, and ultimately unique, correct answer to the increasing differentiation of sciences, which ought to be made accessible to an interested public – in the service of enlightenment:

We are living in a remarkable time, when the conflict of opinions renders a firm foundation of knowledge indispensable, not only to our intellectual, moral, and social progress, but to our holding such ground as we have gained from former ages. While our science is split up into arbitrary divisions; while abstract and concrete science are confounded together, and even mixed up with their application to the arts, and with natural history; and while the researchers of the scientific world are presented as mere accretions to a heterogeneous mass of facts, there can be no hope of a scientific progress which shall satisfy and benefit those large classes of students whose business it is, not to explore, but to receive. The growth of a scientific taste among the working classes of this country is one of the most striking of the signs of the times. I believe no one can inquire into the mode of life of young men of the middle and operative classes without being struck

with the desire that is shown, and the sacrifices that are made, to obtain the means of scientific study.

(Martineau 1853: VII)

Comte's work seemed to her to be too long-winded in its exposition and too heavy duty in its language and 'overloaded with words' (Martineau 1853: VI). To achieve a broader acceptance of the work, she decided to condense the original into two volumes. This interpretive achievement was such a success that Comte preferred the English edition to his own French version, and used it as the basis for a revised edition (von Petzold 1941: 43). Above all, Comte himself praised her abridgement and assured her that he felt 'sure that your name will be linked with mine, for you have executed the only one of those works that will survive among all those which my fundamental treatise has called forth' (Comte, cited in Hill 1989: xlvi). Nevertheless, this achievement, which was expressly acknowledged by the 'founding father' of sociology, was not enough to secure her a place in this developing discipline.

Martineau died in 1876. In her home town of Norwich, a place where history and tradition are otherwise very important and where other significant people lived, there is no longer anything to remind us of her. On the house in which she spent her childhood there is, however, a small plaque which reads: 'James Martineau (1805–1900), Unitarian philosopher and teacher was born in this house and spent his boyhood here'. James was Harriet Martineau's younger brother, her self-confessed favourite.

**'Though the facts sought by travellers relate to Persons, they may most readily be learned from Things' – moral and methodical conditions in observing a society**

Until now, sociologists have been little concerned with characterising and defining the methods they use to examine social phenomena . . . A chapter of *Cours de philosophie positive* is almost the only original and important treatise there is.

(Emile Durkheim 1895: 103)

If Monsieur Durkheim views the chapter of Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive* as being 'almost' the only original and important treatise on methodical questions, of whom else was he thinking when he said 'almost'? It was certainly not Harriet Martineau, although he could (and surely should) have known her. Her 'freely translated and condensed' edition of *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte* (1853) gained some recognition at least, even in France. However, the promised 'link', of which Comte had spoken, was not strong enough. In his considerations on how to observe social phenomena, Durkheim wrote much about Comte and Spencer but not a word about

Martineau. To him she obviously didn't exist. Certainly he could have learned a lot from the methodical reflections she developed in about 250 pages of her book *How to Observe Morals and Manners* ([1838] 1989). Durkheim's *Règles de la méthode sociologique* (trans. [1895] 1982), which is still regarded by the discipline as the first fully elaborated and therefore significant sociological work of methodical consideration, would probably have been to some extent unnecessary.

There are some assumptions and notions about 'how to observe' any society which are shared by Martineau and Durkheim. Let us examine an example of this 'intellectual affinity' between Martineau and Durkheim here. For instance, Martineau wrote:

There is no department of inquiry in which it is not full as easy to miss truth as to find it, even when the materials from which truth is to be drawn are actually present to our senses. A child does not catch a gold fish in water at the first trial, however good his eyes may be, and however clear the water; knowledge and method are necessary to enable him to take what is actually before his eyes and under his hand. So is it with all who fish in a strange element for the truth which is living and moving there: the powers of observation must be trained, and habits of method in arranging the materials presented to the eye must be acquired before the student possesses the requisites for understanding what he contemplates.

(Martineau [1838] 1989: 13)

And 60 years later, we find in Durkheim:

Thus our rule implies no metaphysical conception, no speculation about the innermost depth of being. What it demands is that the sociologist should assume the state of mind of physicists, chemists and physiologists when they venture into an as yet unexplored area of their scientific field. As the sociologist penetrates into the social world he should be conscious that he is penetrating into the unknown. He must feel himself in the presence of facts governed by laws as yet unsuspected as those of life before the science of biology was evolved. He must hold himself ready to make discoveries which will surprise and disconcert him.

(Durkheim [1895] 1982: 37–8)

It may be that the spirit of the time led both to form similar or associated ideas. It is fact, however, that Martineau developed and published her thesis a considerable time before Durkheim.

Martineau's considerations start with the problem of how the evident

differences in social life within one society and in different societies can be recorded, interpreted and transferred into what we would call today an ethnographically sound description. In her writing, Martineau develops quasi ideal/typical assumptions of a 'good' society, which are used as the benchmarks for assessing the level of development of the society being analysed. In this way, historical process can be understood as an ascending and, when all is said and done, goal-orientated development process: societies pass through various stages of civilization, from a 'barbarous state' to an 'enlightened state'. The criterion for achievement of this final stage is the extent and distribution of 'happiness'. For Martineau, the measure of this 'happiness' is the freedom within which man can act in a morally responsible manner. Hallmarks of the 'ideal' society are the fair distribution of material wealth, comprehensive public education, the realization of sexual equality, effective and ordered self-government and a progressive cultural and scientific development. With these criteria upon which to measure itself, no society could conceive of reaching the end of its developmental life. She therefore questions the consequences of the dominant morals and manners in relation to different social practices. If there is still inequality despite increasing civilization, through which moral ideas and social practice is such inequality legitimized?

Consequently, she enquires into the nature of social experience. At first glance the relationships between people – between men and women, between individuals of different social positions or of race – appear to define such experience. The way in which these relationships are concretely shaped, however, is dependent on the prevailing ethical/moral principles and the resultant actions and behaviour (manners). This difference between the appearance of a social phenomenon and its nature makes it imperative that a well-founded research methodology and a method be drawn up; a method which deciphers the meaning of a 'social fact' using interpretative processes.

And how can the 'morals and manners' of any civilization be established? This is precisely the question that Martineau aims to explore in her reflections on 'how to observe morals and manners'. First, an independent method of research and logical enquiry are required. The would-be social researcher must undergo three-fold training: intellectual, ethical and practical.

On the intellectual level, the researcher must acquire an appropriate competence that enables critical reflection on personal impressions and prejudices. He or she must be careful to not create prejudice. Martineau sees the main obstacle for social progress and human development in the production and reproduction of narrow-mindedness regarding foreigners and unknown social and cultural habits. Therefore she insists on creating specifically responsible ethics, to leave the restrictions of unreflected observations behind. This specific research ethic – which is also the second stage of training – includes three indispensable 'requisites': first, the observer should define the aim of his or her observation. She or he must be certain what she or he actually wants to know.

Just collecting information by observing the people of a foreign country does not really help our understanding of the distinct habits of individuals or the cultural and social differences between the nation visited and the traveller's country of origin. Coming to the second requisite – finding out the common denominator of observations – Martineau is looking for the opportunity to obtain some useful results. What can be concluded from discovering the various ways in which people live together? What judgements can be drawn from observation of the divergent circumstances existing in different societies? The following quotation illustrates how Martineau examines social practices by taking gender and cultural differences as categories for analysis:

In the extreme North, there is the snow-hut of the Esquimaux, shining with the fire within, like an alabaster lamp left burning in a wide waste; within the beardless father is mending his weapons made of fishbones, while the dwarfed mother swathes her infant in skins, and feeds it with oil and fat. In the extreme East, there is the Chinese family in their garden, treading its paved walks, or seated under the shade of its artificial rocks; the master displaying the claws of his left hand as he smokes his pipe, and his wife tottering on her deformed feet as she follows her child – exulting over it if it be a boy; grave and full of sighs if heaven has sent her none but girls. In the extreme South, there is the Colonist of the Cape, lazily basking before his door, while he sends his labourer abroad with his bullock-wagon, devolves the business of the farm upon the women, and scares from his door any poor Hottentot who may have wandered hither over the plain. In the extreme West, there is the gathering together on the shores of the Pacific of the hunters laden with furs. The men are trading, or cleaning their arms, or sleeping; the squaws are cooking, or dyeing with vegetable juices the quills of the porcupine or the hair of the moose-deer. In the intervals between these extremities, there is a world of morals and manners, as diverse as the surface of the lands on which they are exhibited.

(Martineau [1838] 1989: 30f)

The duty of the responsible traveller now consists of working out the common denominator of all observations. What connects and underlies all observable manners? Only if he or she figures out this, can he or she be certain of having a useful criterion and test for all his or her observations. It is the pursuit of happiness that connects all manners. Furthermore, sensitive research requires 'a philosophical and definite . . . notion about the origin of human feelings of right and wrong' (Martineau [1838] 1989: 51). Contradicting the popular notion that the 'human feelings of right and wrong' belong to the natural make-up of human beings, Martineau insists that these feelings are

formed by circumstances. Here she argues with a historical and a cross-cultural perspective:

Now, mankind are, and always have been, so far from agreeing as to right and wrong, that it is necessary to account in some manner for the wide differences in various ages, and among various nations . . . A person who takes for granted that there is an universal Moral Sense among men . . . cannot reasonably explain how it was that those men were once esteemed the most virtuous who killed the most enemies in battle, while now it is considered far more noble to save life than to destroy. They cannot but wonder how it was that it was once thought a great shame to live in misery, and an honour to commit suicide; while now the wisest and best men think exactly reverse. And, with regard to the present age, it must puzzle men who suppose that all ought to think alike on moral subjects, that there are parts of the world where mothers believe it a duty to drown their children, and that eastern potentates openly deride the king of England for having only one wife instead of hundred . . . We see that in other cases – with regard to science, to art, and to the appearances of nature – feelings grow out of knowledge and experience; and there is every evidence that it is so with regard to morals.

(Martineau [1838] 1989: 33ff)

The third requisite relates to the problem of acknowledgement. Although Martineau disputes that there is such a thing as an innate 'human feeling of right and wrong', the question of pinpointing the origin of human morals remains. Or to put it another way: is there a universal moral value that is also central to the idea of justice? And who guarantees this universal moral value? In her view it results from a 'gigantic general influence' (Martineau [1838] 1989: 51) that is to be understood as an external, divine-like system or metaphysical value. The social observer is obliged to acknowledge this universal principle. Even if the fundamental principle is a universal principle, ideas of how to achieve it depend on the different social and cultural practices of the various societies. All behaviour must be interpreted on the basis of this generally applicable moral principle. Martineau warns inexperienced researchers about the 'observation trap', whereby an action may be considered moral in one society but have negative connotations in another. Recognized behaviour from one's own society must not be used as a key to the moral basis of behaviour in another. All forms of ethnocentrism represent a serious risk for those who wish to understand other cultures by observing them.

On the practical level of research (Martineau [1838] 1989: 232ff), Martineau suggests the use of diverse, carefully implemented investigative techniques such as making a field diary, recording conversations or copying

registers. Having established the conditions necessary for observing in a 'good order', Martineau glances at the object of observation: what must be observed to gain true ideas about the state of morals and manners in any society? Is it necessary to interview men and women? Martineau doesn't think so. Instead, she advocates careful collection of social facts:

The grand secret of wise inquiry into Morals and Manners is to begin with the study of *things*, using the *discourse of persons* as a commentary upon them. Though the facts sought by travellers relate to Persons, they may most readily be learned from Things. The eloquence of Institutions and Records, in which the action of the nation is embodied and perpetuated, is more comprehensive and more faithful than that of any variety of individual voices. The voice of a whole people goes up in the silent workings of an institution; the condition of the masses is reflected from the surface of a record.

(Martineau 1838a: 73f)<sup>2</sup>

Since Martineau sets herself the task of assessing the moral status of societies as a whole, and since this assessment depends largely on the empirically gathered facts (although interpreted in the light of universal principles), the quality of the observation data is of vital importance. Martineau repeatedly and emphatically makes the point that observations must be representative. Bias is to be avoided. All institutionalized specimens must be observed in all locations, within all classes, in all areas. Observers must not be influenced by the ruling classes and must, at the same time, remain open to opinions and insights – a difficult task even for experienced researchers.

Within this part of her reflections Martineau presents an abundance of examples and evidence of how the 'institutions' and 'records' of any nation can tell a story about the specific morals and manners. She explores in fields that include culture ('religion', 'general moral notions'), economy ('domestic state') and politics ('idea of liberty', 'progress'), themes like national identity, domestic relations and their consequences for the situation of women, social classes, types of religion, normality and deviance, types of suicide and the meaning of repressive social institutions. The recording of micro sociological phenomena – for example, the differences in the lives of those who live in the town and those who live in the country, different eating and drinking cultures, cultural habits and tendencies both at home and outside the home, the provision of commodities, family life, the significance of the dead for the living and so on – provides us with information about the macro sociological status of a society, that is the ethical constitution of a society. To give an example:

The traveller everywhere finds woman treated as the inferior party in a compact in which both parties have an equal interest. Any

agreement thus formed is imperfect, and is liable to disturbance. The degree of the degradation of woman is as good a test as the moralist can adopt for ascertaining the state of domestic morals in any country. The Indian squaw carries the household burdens, trudging in the dust, while her husband on horseback paces before her, unencumbered but by his own gay trappings. She carries the wallet with food, the matting for the lodge, the merchandise (if they possess any) and her infant. There is no exemption from labour for the squaw of the most vaunted chief. In other countries the wife may be found drawing the plough, hewing wood and carrying water; the men of the family standing idle to witness her toils. Here the observer may feel pretty sure of his case. From a condition of slavery like this, women are found rising to the highest condition in which they are at present seen in France, England and the United States – where they are less than half-educated, precluded from earning a subsistence, except in a very few ill-paid employments, and prohibited from giving or withholding their assent to laws which they are yet bound by penalties to obey.

(Martineau [1838] 1989: 178f)

Martineau's methodological proposals are those of a sophisticated social theorist who keenly understands two critical and fundamental principles: first, that all observers, irrespective of how carefully they work, make mistakes, can read too much into something and can become the victims of their own assumptions, and second, that it is in our nature that human beings are selective and make interpretations in their intervention in the social world.

#### 'While woman's intellect is confined . . .' – on the position of women in the US

Men are ungentle, tyrannical. They abuse the right of the strongest, however they may veil the abuse with indulgence. They want the magnanimity to discern woman's human rights; and they crush her morals rather than allow them. Women are, as might be anticipated, weak, ignorant and subservient, in as far as they exchange self-reliance for reliance on anything out of themselves.

(Martineau 1837: 162)

In *Society in America* (1837), in which she compared life in North America with the theoretical claims of a democratic system, Martineau describes the political and legislative institutions in the US, its economy, social norms and cultural life. She stresses the differences between agricultural practices in Great Britain

and those in the US, concerns herself with the effects of the slave trade on the economic system and analyses the position of women.

In the section on women, Martineau argues that a democracy in which the power of the ruling class depends on the consent of those being governed, yet one that simultaneously excludes women completely, is absurd. She found that although the legal status of women in the US was better than that in Europe, their position was basically the same as that of slaves in that they had no political voice, their life was heteronomous and they were invisible in public life. This exclusion from political reality was camouflaged as gallantry, which resulted in destruction of women's individuality. Martineau was a harsh judge of 'pro-women' campaigners such as Jefferson in America or John Stuart Mill in England. She strongly rejected the view that it would be best if women were represented by their protective husbands or fathers. She argued that the interests of women and men are not the same and thus could neither be 'delegated' to men nor withheld from women. When comparing the education of women in both England and America, she found similarities in that in both countries women were only given a smattering of knowledge and hence remained excluded from the professions. The greatest disadvantage to women in America was their systematic exclusion from gainful employment.

Martineau also addressed, in her conclusion, the issue of how such an asymmetrical social relationship was established and maintained. She discovered that, essentially, women in America were subjected to a hegemonic relationship which, whether they knew it or not, left them scarred. This hegemonic relationship is characterized by the dominance of the 'masters' – legitimized as chivalry – over women. So what happens to women during this process? They are swindled out of their individuality and are subject to the illusion that they can realize themselves in their exile to the familial and private spheres. How did this prevailing ideology of gender become ingrained in the minds of women?

Martineau concludes from her observations that this situation is the outcome not of an individual, but a structural power/dominance relationship where the conditions of socialization seem to be responsible for the subordinate role played by women in gender relationships. In marked contrast to predominant scientific ideas of the time, Martineau did not see nature as the cause of the apparent difference between the sexes. So what were the methods of education? Martineau makes a distinction between two forms that are causally related. There was an official and a sinister syllabus for the education of the sexes. The official syllabus, which is addressed relatively early in life, determined what boys should learn and what girls should learn, and which abilities and skills they should develop. This, in turn, was determined by the content of the 'sinister' syllabus for the education of the sexes resulting from the 'discipline of circumstance' (Martineau 1837: 157). The content of this 'sinister syllabus' for women suggested that, as there were no concrete roles for

women in public life, women did not need comprehensive education or training. Martineau draws a direct parallel here between (backward-thinking) English education and (supposedly democratic, egalitarian) American education. There were abilities and skills that everyone learnt in both countries, the essential outcome of which was to maintain women in an inferior position:

The intellect of woman is confined by an unjustifiable restriction of both methods of education – by express teaching, and by the discipline of circumstance . . . There is a profession of some things being taught which are supposed necessary because everybody learns them. They serve to fill up time, to occupy attention harmlessly, to improve conversation, and to make women something like companions to their husbands, and able to teach their children somewhat. But what is given is, for the most part, passively received; and what is obtained is, chiefly, by means of the memory. There is rarely or never a careful ordering of influences for the promotion of clear intellectual activity.

(Martineau 1837: 157)

How could women develop as individuals under these circumstances? What opportunities and perspectives did they have? Martineau makes the point that in the US they could hope for nothing but marriage. An alternative to this would be another genuinely female area of work: religion. Martineau exposes this apparent option as pure ideology, for in contemplating religious questions, women find, at best, a way of passing time and gaining a moral education. For Martineau, the 'true' domain of intellectual discussion is not religion itself, but the science of religion, or theology. Yet here, as with other areas of scientific endeavour, women were denied entry. In this respect, women in America (just like their European sisters) were forced back to the institution of marriage, for which they were exclusively and systematically prepared, and at the same time learnt to act as though they wanted nothing more.

Martineau concluded that female morals and consciousness, in American society too, are suppressed and corrupted. The 'discovery' made during the Enlightenment, that all people have the gifts of reason and understanding and must *responsibly* take their place in society, now evidently applies to only part of humanity. If gender-specific education fails, in the sense that women are no longer content simply to adopt their allocated place in the 'house and home', there is a more polished instrument available which is to send them back behind their barriers. The public opinion machine pounces on those who express subversive political opinions. This repressive ruling apparatus functions superbly. Martineau describes the repressive strategies used on many women in her writings on slavery. She concludes that women are 'permitted' to act charitably and compassionately, but not politically.



Martineau asserts that the division of the relationship between the sexes, the allocation of the 'public' sphere to men and 'private' sphere to women, is the result of a repressive process of assertion of ownership and dominance. This superordinate/subordinate relationship between the sexes is established using the vehicles of education and gender politics. What began as a socially mediated socialization process has been de-socialized and quasi-naturalized. Martineau disputes the prevailing view that there are typically male and typically female virtues. She does not deny that there are specifically male/female capacities for labour, something that cannot be addressed by any researcher since people are already social beings. However, it is not scientifically sound to conclude from this, anecdotally, that virtues generally considered 'robust' can be attributed to men, and that the more gentle virtues can be attributed to women. This kind of model does not explain the difference between the sexes, but legitimizes what is ultimately a patriarchal relationship.

### **When 'founding fathers' were adversaries. Jenny P. d'Héricourt and the critique of emerging sociological discourse**

Each [political writer] gives himself his own theme; each takes off from his own ideas, his own system, and his own theory, and often his ideas are prejudices, his system is a novel and his theory a chimera.  
(Comte 1816–28)

When the French social philosopher Jenny P. d'Héricourt was criticizing contemporary social thinkers in journal articles and open letters in the 1850s, it was not just her severe comments and her provocative opinions that caused a sensation. Just as scandalous was the fact that a woman was meddling in the discussion of modern society. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, a writer on political economy in whose work both the emergence of a theory of anarchy and theorems of early sociology were worked out (Ansart 1967), was one of those who picked up the debate with d'Héricourt, only to abruptly break it off again. In December 1856, d'Héricourt had published an open letter entitled 'Mister Proudhon and the women's question', which contained a severe critique of his repeated derogatory remarks regarding the 'natural' lesser value of women and the impossibility of an egalitarian societal arrangement between women and men. In January 1857, Proudhon informed his critic, also in the form of an open letter, that he might well enter into an intellectual debate with her, but that she ought to allow herself to be represented by a male 'guardian' (*parrain*) who would sign her articles and take responsibility for everything she said. He declared his intention to perform an 'intellectual and moral autopsy' on her. In this endeavour he would necessarily have to infringe all the 'rules of

propriety' that men are expected to observe for women – and to which he personally felt obliged – as Jenny P. d'Héricourt had herself asked him not to sacrifice his powers of argument to gallantry. Admittedly she would not like this – Proudhon knew his opponent – but this, he wrote, was a disadvantage of her position as a woman that she would have to bear bravely. And another reason listed by Proudhon that had little to do with propriety yet went to the core of the dispute was the fact that by addressing his views to a woman, he would be acknowledging her. It would be inconsistent and indeed paradoxical to argue for the predominance of the man by entering into debate with a woman, Proudhon wrote, anticipating his opponent's comment. D'Héricourt could not possibly have imagined, he concluded, that he would fall into this trap (Proudhon 1857: 166f).

Indeed, to have recognized a woman as a partner in debate would have meant granting her authority as a speaking subject in a discussion of the social. This was precisely what Proudhon was so fervently rejecting. In this sense, this dispute should not be treated as an isolated incident. Instead, this episode can be seen as a paradigmatic expression of what is at stake here: the contested foundations of the masculinization of the subject ('the sociologist') and the object ('the social') in the debate about modern society at a time at which the 'incubation period' of sociology was drawing to a close and the actual 'foundation period' of the discipline was about to come into being (Lepenes 1981a: IX). Our intention is to show that although this masculinization was asserted as self-evident, it was at the same time contested and fragile. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's refusal to respond to a woman addressing him demonstrates the efforts to impose the social and cognitive identity of a discourse in which the literal masculinity of the speaker and the metaphorical masculinity of the social are mutually reinforcing.<sup>3</sup> It is significant that the literal woman, Jenny P. d'Héricourt, need not be silenced, but must be made to vanish behind a literally masculine guardian. This not only illustrates the dependence of the metaphorical masculinity of the discourse on the literal masculinity of its speaker, but also the dependence of the literal masculinity of the speaker on the metaphorical masculinity of the discourse – hence the emotional undercurrent of Proudhon's reaction to his opponent. More well-disposed, but just as irritated as Proudhon, the literary critic Jules de Goncourt declared that d'Héricourt had 'in her style the omnipotence of the beard' (quoted by Adam 1904: 55), while others, somewhat less amicably, maintained that she was a 'reasoning machine' (quoted by d'Héricourt [1864] 1981: XI). Quite clearly, the irritation caused by a woman arrogating to herself authorship in the discourse on the social can only be nullified by a metaphorical 'defeminization' or even 'dehumanization' of the author or by the literal 'masculinization' of her words by a 'guardian'.

D'Héricourt was, of course, less than impressed by Proudhon's demand and steadfastly pursued her critique publicly and under her own name. Her

point was precisely to assert *as a woman* the right to shape the discourse: 'Now . . . it belongs to me, a woman, to speak myself on behalf of my rights, without leaning on anything but Justice and Reason' (d'Héricourt [1864] 1981: 208). This is how she introduces her deliberations on social theory in her book, *Women Affranchized* (1800). The declared aim of this book was not to explain society, but 'to prove that woman has the same rights as man' (d'Héricourt [1864] 1981: IX). However it was her analysis of the conditions of female existence in society, as well as her critique of contemporary theories on femininity and masculinity, that steered her thinking in genuinely sociological directions, despite the fact that there were as yet no clear lines of demarcation between discussions of 'the social' and those of philosophy, literature or the natural sciences. This discourse on 'the social', however, already had a 'founding father' in the person of Auguste Comte, and it was with Comte that d'Héricourt engaged critically. As a preface to d'Héricourt's critique of Comte we first recapitulate the author's biography in brief.

### Biography

Jenny P. d'Héricourt was born in Besançon in 1809 as Jeanne-Marie-Fabienne Poinard, daughter of a Protestant and republican couple (see Offen (1987) for more on d'Héricourt's biography). The pseudonym 'd'Héricourt' was taken for the Lutheran village of the Franche-Comté her father came from and stresses her attachment to her religious and political origins. After her father's death in 1817, the family moved to Paris. In 1827 d'Héricourt finished training to be teacher; in 1832 she married the civil servant Michel-Gabriel-Joseph Marie whom she left four years later. From 1836 on she took private lessons in anatomy, physiology and history of nature. In 1852 she did a course in midwifery at the Maternité in Paris and subsequently opened a consulting room for women and children. Already having placed 'herself on the ground which men preserve for themselves' (d'Héricourt quoted in Offen 1987: 156) by studying natural sciences and practising medicine, she encroached further on masculine terrain by intervening in the theoretical debate about modern society and the question of women. This wasn't, however, her first engagement in post-revolutionary social theory and politics. Jenny P. d'Héricourt had already some experience as an adherent of the early communist movement in the 1840s, having worked with the communist Etienne Cabet, writing articles and short stories for his newspaper as well as a novel, at the heart of which was an intense social critique. By 1848 she had abandoned her commitment to communism, criticizing the lack of consideration of the status of women in the communist movement. She had participated in the early feminist movement whose demands were ignored by the *Seconde République* in 1848 and which was totally repressed by the regime of Napoleon III in the 1850s. In these years d'Héricourt became a collabor-

ator in the Parisian *Revue philosophique et religieuse*, a liberal and Protestant review concerned with social philosophy and politics. In this review she wrote critiques of Christianity, several articles on homeopathic medicine, as well as critiques of Auguste Comte, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the historian Jules Michelet. In 1860 her main work, *La femme affranchie. Réponse à MM. Michelet, Proudhon, E. de Girardin, A. Comte et aux autres novateurs modernes* (1860) was published and four years later an abridged version was translated into English.<sup>4</sup> In this book she re-published her articles from the *Revue philosophique et religieuse* and added further critiques of political and social movements and theorists. Furthermore, she developed her own social theory, wrote about the social and legal position of women in France and provided a programme for a feminist movement as well as an educational programme. In 1863 Jenny P. d'Héricourt moved to Chicago, where she worked with the American feminist movement until her return to France roughly ten years later. She died in 1875 and left some manuscripts that were probably burnt after her death.

### Auguste Comte and the female brain: the scientific critique

Jenny P. d'Héricourt would probably have disagreed with a history of sociology that declares Auguste Comte as a 'founding father' of the discipline. Admittedly, she engaged with the 'late' Comte, the Comte who in the last decade of his life declared positivism to be a 'religion' and who had, in 1852, written a *Catéchisme positiviste ou Sommaire exposition de la religion universelle de l'humanité* which is not counted as one of the canonical texts, even in the history of sociology, but rather is attributed to a pathological personality development.<sup>5</sup> Yet d'Héricourt, too, distinguishes the Comte of the catechism as the promulgator of a 'socio-religious organization' from the 'rational' Comte of the *Cours de philosophie positive* and the *Système de politique positive* (d'Héricourt [1864] 1981: 119) – whose dissemination a critically informed Martineau had made her own task. D'Héricourt is, however, convinced that, while the former Comte was no more than the vulgarizer of his teacher, Saint-Simon, the latter Comte was the true, original Comte. And the writing of this Comte could not be recommended 'unless in your heart and soul you believe yourself deserving of many years of purgatory, which you prefer to expiate on the earth' (d'Héricourt [1864] 1981: 119f). It was not only Auguste Comte's poor style, which was and continues to be obfuscatory, that caused readers endless suffering. More importantly for Jenny P. d'Héricourt, who had been trained in Enlightenment rationalism and Kantian thinking, were 'the clouds and mists of metaphysics' in which Comte's thinking enveloped itself and threatened to envelop others (d'Héricourt 1855: 47).<sup>6</sup>

With typical irony, d'Héricourt seizes on the 'mission' that Comte places

on women and translates it into an authorization of her position as an intellectual opponent:

Being a woman, I am, in Mister Comte's opinion one of the greatest representations of the Great Being, a piece of the highest social providence, a moral providence. With all these titles, I must be heard respectfully by the grand priest of humanity. He shall listen to me then.

(D'Héricourt 1855: 55)

Auguste Comte was, of course, not thinking of theoretical critique when he spoke of the unique moral mission of woman, as in his eyes it was by affectivity, not intellect, that the female character defined itself. And he saw this exclusive affective competence as being grounded in the female brain that, for its part, did not give women the capacity for intellectual or productive activity. From these anatomical 'facts' Comte derived sex-typed functions: women belong to family and home where they fulfil their mission in making men sociable and moral persons and therefore in providing the necessary condition for society. Influenced by female affectivity, men can learn to temper their natural tendency to individualize, synonymous with egoism, and to develop instead their sociability, synonymous with altruism. Women, while making society possible, do not engage *in* society, defined as it is as the net of interrelationships of productive and intellectual *men*. Hence, women are the theoretical matter of 'social statics', while men are the theoretical matter of 'social dynamics' which constitutes the proper object of the science of 'sociology'. Women therefore are at once charged with the most fundamental problem of modern society – the guarantee of social integration – and at the same time excluded from society. They were supposedly able to exert an imminent influence on men while at the same time subjected to patriarchal control by men in the family and the state.

There are reasons associated with the history of science for the proto-sociological question of the organization of society overlapping with natural-science argumentation in Comte's anatomical foundation of an order of things in this vein. On the one hand, proto-sociological discourse was heavily associated with the biological sciences.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the biological sciences themselves were increasingly important as a reference point for the elaboration of sexual difference and gender relations which was given impetus by the upsurge of the excessively meaningful 'women's special anthropology' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Honegger 1991b; see also Jordanova 1989; Laqueur 1990). D'Héricourt does not deny that there could be a relationship between the biological and social conditions of women and men. She too has recourse to Comte's expert witnesses on the subject of female affectivity and male intellectualism and productivity that phrenology

attributed to differentiated brains. Yet natural science thinking does not mislead her into the determinist reductionism for which she rebukes Comte:

Since you believe in Gall and Spurzheim, you know that the encephalon of the two sexes is alike, that it is modifiable in both, that all education is founded on this modifiability; why has it never occurred to you that if man *en masse* is more rational than woman, it is because education, laws and custom have developed in him the anterior lobes of the brain; while in woman, education, laws, and custom develop especially the posterior lobes of this organ; and why, having established these facts, have you not been led to conclude that, since organs are developed only in consequence of the excitants applied to them, it is probable that man and woman, subjected to the same cerebral excitants, would be developed in the same manner, with the shades of difference peculiar to each individuality; and that for woman to be developed harmoniously under her three aspects, she must manifest herself socially under three aspects? Be sure, sir, your principle is thrice false, thrice in contradiction to science and reason; in the presence of the physiology of the brain, all theories of classification fall to the ground: before the nervous system, women are the equals of men: they can be their inferiors only before muscular supremacy, attacked by the invention of powder, and about to be reduced to dust by the triumph of mechanism.

(D'Héricourt [1864] 1981: 132f)

D'Héricourt first denies any causal-deterministic relation between a fixed brain structure on the one hand and sex-typed functions and a corresponding social structure on the other hand. Against this sort of reductionism, she uses a scientific argument for a sociological consideration of sexual differences and gender relations. She argues that all human organs, including the brain, are modifiable and by that modifiability humans get a 'second nature' by habituation specific to the social milieu and the educational influence. Hence, d'Héricourt insisted on the social, cultural and historical dimension of differences between women and men: if women were indeed less rational and more affective than men, this was an effect of societal organization and cultural customs and therefore subject to historical change. For d'Héricourt there is a comprehensive potential in all humans, independent of their sex, and unbalanced development of this potential leads to a perversion of human nature:

But you, who wish to annihilate woman, from what principle do you draw such a consequence? That she is an affective power, you say . . . yes, but, as to that, man is such, likewise; and is not woman, as well

as he, alike intellect and activity? By reason of a purely accidental predominance, can one half of the human species be banished beyond the clouds of sentimentality? And ought not all serious discipline to tend to develop, not one phase of the being, but the ponderation, the harmony of all its phases? Want of harmony is the source of disorder and deformity. The woman who is solely sentimental commits irreparable errors; the man who is solely rational is a species of monster, and the person in whom activity predominates is but a brute.

(D'Héricourt [1864] 1981: 132)

From this perspective, far from proving a natural difference and natural inequality between women and men, phrenology instead reveals a natural equality of all human beings. As in a truly modern society where everyone is equal before the law – the illusion is evident – everyone is 'equal before the nervous system'. To follow d'Héricourt's own reasoning: since everyone is equal before the nervous system, everyone is equal in society and there is no scientific justification possible for the confinement of women to affective functions and their subordination under the political control of men. Comte's scientific reasoning was revealed as nothing other than a political option which d'Héricourt called unmistakably the 'social annihilation' of women (d'Héricourt [1864] 1981: 69, 132).

### Theories of classification: the epistemological critique

Since Comte's and others' outlines of a social theory were operating with underlying theories of sexual difference, d'Héricourt added to her scientific critique an epistemological critique which resulted in what may tentatively be called an 'agnosticism' towards every attempt to theorize sexual difference. Her starting point was that all existing definitions of maleness and femaleness didn't match the heterogeneity of social reality: 'Men, and women after them, have deemed it proper hitherto to class man and woman separately; to define each type, and to deduce from this ideal the functions suited to each sex. Neither has chosen to see that numerous facts contradict this classification' (D'Héricourt [1864] 1981: 225). D'Héricourt didn't deny the existence of a pre-social sexual difference; she was even convinced that biological differences between the sexes relate to an ontological difference. However, this ontological difference could be neither described nor theorized:

We do not give a classification, because we neither have nor can have one; the elements for its establishment are lacking. A biological deduction permits us to affirm that such a one exists; but it is impossible to disengage its law in the present surroundings; the veritable

feminine stamp will be known only after one or two centuries of like education and equal rights.

(D'Héricourt [1864] 1981: 243f)

Therefore, a social theory that claims the naturalness of differences resulting from socialization and prescribed social positions mistakes for pre-social sexual difference what in fact is an effect of power relations and the will to tame heterogeneity.<sup>8</sup> 'Ah no, gentlemen, these are not men and women; they are the deplorable results of your selfishness, of your frightful spirit of domination, of your imbecility . . .' (d'Héricourt [1864] 1981: 245). Since the existing differences between women and men are social and not ontological facts, these differences cannot in any way be a legitimation for sex-typed social functions and political inequality, and neither can they be legitimized by an appeal to ontological difference that must be assumed but at present cannot be known.

If the ontological difference between the sexes could be recognized when – and only when – the social influence is precisely determined, then knowledge of the difference between the sexes itself remains, at best, doubtful and purely speculative. The essence behind the phenomenon of the difference between the sexes is fundamentally beyond human knowledge and the methods of the scientific view: 'Our reason can only recognise the phenomena and their laws, but not the essence of things or their ultimate causes. These do not belong to the domain of science' (D'Héricourt 1860: vol. II, p. 253). The reality beyond its manifest phenomenon can never be adequately represented by knowledge, because knowledge always organizes itself in categories, which abstract from the variety of social reality. These categories systematize and classify reality, but do not coincide with it. Since objective reality is only manifest in the appearance, the abstracts of 'femininity' or 'masculinity' exist only as qualities of a female or male individual. If the category of 'sex' is only conceivable through abstraction from the individuality of all women and men and, at the same time, the quality of 'sex' is only realized in the individual being, then neither does the individuality dissolve in membership of a sex, nor is the sexual identity suspended in individual being: 'There are as many different men as there are male individuals, as many different women as female individuals' (D'Héricourt 1860: vol. II, p. 114). And this also means that once centuries of non-sex-typed education and social organization have passed, any reason for classification of humanity into women and men will become superfluous: 'then there will be no need of a classification, for the function will fall naturally to the proper functionary under a system of equality in which the social elements classify themselves' (d'Héricourt [1864] 1981: 243f).

D'Héricourt argues from a position between biological determinism and social constructivism and thus within those epistemological parameters in which the modern debate over the difference between the sexes and sexual

relations is caught. Given, however, that neither of these two perspectives admit a primacy of knowledge of the difference between the sexes, she argues against reductionisms of any kind and opts for an ontologically agnostic attitude. Thus she wrenches the phenomenon of the differences between the sexes from the grip of the biologists, and opens it up to a genuinely sociological analysis. In this way she extends the reach of sociological consideration of society and the modern. She asserts, again in opposition to Comte and the contemporary hegemonic thinking regarding the difference between the sexes, the possibility and facticity of female individuality that in the context of modern social theories also means the possibility and facticity of female capacities to associate in modern society.<sup>9</sup>

### **Beyond masculinity: the empirical critique and fragments of a theory of modern society**

If Auguste Comte positioned his desk vis-à-vis a mirror and 'was always looking at himself' when he wrote (Lepenes 1988: 46), then d'Héricourt must have worked at an open window. Her thinking was shot through with a clear and unwavering sense of social reality, which anchored her theoretical activity. She criticized Comte's theory precisely because it ignored the reach of empirically observable social change. 'They say, gentleman, that you don't read anymore, and I could convince myself of that fact, since it seems that you don't know a word about the mental and material state of the different elements of our French society, especially in what concerns my sex' (d'Héricourt 1855: 59). For woman, d'Héricourt claimed, 'is no longer confined to the care of children and household, but instead she is engaged more and more in the production of national and individual welfare' (d'Héricourt 1860: vol. II, p. 273).

Yet this factual 'integration' of women into the labour market was paralleled by her exclusion of civil and political rights, by her subordination under patriarchal control in the state and in marriage, and this, d'Héricourt was convinced, revealed an imminent social pathology. Woman must be man's equal in every aspect of social life, 'because the progress of Enlightenment, in which woman participates, has transformed her in social power, and because this new power produces evil in default of the good which it is not permitted to do' (d'Héricourt [1864] 1981: X). Therefore the emancipation of woman is not only the political imperative of an enlightened society that claims to constitute itself as a just one, but also a social necessity.

Implicitly, d'Héricourt's reasoning relates to the problem which was of most intense concern to pre-sociological discourse and through which this discourse gained its specificity that should lead to the emergence of the sociological discipline: the question of how social order is possible (Luhmann 1996: 21). It was her claim for female individuality which led d'Héricourt to face this

problem more radically than Comte did, while her critique revealed that her adversary's theorizing of female and male functions was far more than an ephemeral issue of his sociology. Auguste Comte saw a modern society that was founded on the division of labour, as constantly menaced by an excess of (male) individualization through specialization that would inescapably lead to disintegration. His theoretical construction of egoistic, individualized man tending to disintegration, and altruistic, non-individualized woman as the bulwark against such disintegration was therefore intricately woven into his answer to the question of social order in a modern society. This radical and essential dualism of women's and men's functional positions in society was, for Comte, nothing less than an indispensable condition of social integration.

For d'Héricourt, what was fundamentally wrong in this theory – besides the mistaken ontology of sexual difference – was Comte's idea of (male) individualism leading genuinely to disintegration if it was not tamed by (female) altruism:

*To live for others, this is the basis of your moral. My answer to you is: this moral is false and unjust; false because it does not take account of the two elements of any moral code: the individual and society; unjust because if it is bad for the collective to be absorbed by the individual it is no less so for the individual to be absorbed by the collective.*

(D'Héricourt 1855: 57)

Comte's reduction of the individual to social benefit seemed to d'Héricourt to be just as incorrect as the utilitarian reduction of society to its benefit for the individual against which Comte argued. In trying to overcome both these errors, d'Héricourt confronted a problem that would become, some decades later, the main concern of Emile Durkheim, disciple of d'Héricourt's close friend Charles Renouvier. This is the problem of the compatibility of a 'regulated social order with individual freedom and personal autonomy' (Müller and Schmid 1996: 481) and is at the root of attempts to theorize the relationship between the individual and society in a non-reductive way (Luhmann 1996: 31).<sup>10</sup> In grappling with this problematic, d'Héricourt was developing the outlines of a concept of integration in modern society that Durkheim was to make a milestone of sociological theorizing through his elaboration of the concept of 'organic solidarity'. For Durkheim, the division of labour is the source of organic solidarity that, in contrast to mechanical solidarity, integrates not the equal but the unequal into a social body. Organic solidarity presupposes that individuals differ from one another and only becomes possible 'when each has his completely autonomous field of activity, when he thus has a personality' (Durkheim [1893] 1996: 183). The more divided the labour and the more personal the activities are, according to

Durkheim's thesis, the stronger the social coherence. D'Héricourt had used a similar formulation around 30 years earlier:

You should not forget that reason and science prove to you that everything is *composed*, consequently has an *extent*, is *divisible*, *limited* and *relational*, that *diversity is the condition of unity* and that *a being is the more perfect the more it is composed of diversity*

(D'Héricourt 1860: vol. II, p. 253)

Applied to society, this means that social cohesion grows proportionally with the degree of social differentiation – social order demands a 'variety of capabilities that are too diverse for any single one of us to be able to combine them within ourselves' (d'Héricourt 1860: vol. II, p. 14). D'Héricourt sees the conditions of this development in industrial and scientific progress which increasingly differentiates all productive activities and in which women participate.

Since she did not make a distinction between the female and the male potential for individualization and the corresponding right to specialized activity and an individualized existence, d'Héricourt was compelled to think through the problematic of social order in a modern society more radically and the question of the relationship of individual and society more fundamentally than was Comte, precisely because she included women. And unlike d'Héricourt, Durkheim would not derive the concept of organic solidarity from personal potential and the right of each individual to develop his individuality, but from the sexual division of labour as the first and original form of social differentiation. Durkheim also believed – and in this he was not too far away from Comte – that he could get around the risk of social disintegration with a progressive differentiation of the sexes (Durkheim [1933] 1964; Lehmann 1991; Roth 1992; Chapter 1, this volume). And in an unbroken tradition, he was to draw on Gustave le Bon's phrenology to support this line of reasoning. D'Héricourt, meanwhile, relied in a theoretically more rigorous fashion on the integrative effects of an individualization that also breaks through the difference between the sexes. When solidarity comes about as a result of people being reliant on each other because of their differing capabilities, only the free development of all individuals, including women, can create social cohesion. Here she was not only adding a social-theoretical argument to the philosophical reasoning within feminist discourse, but also liberating proto-sociological discourse from the restrictions of a speculative and hierarchical ontology of sexual difference.

While modernity for us may be marked by masculine individualism, gender dualism and the exclusion of women, for d'Héricourt it was a still unfulfilled promise of a non-gender-divided society. Being confronted with social theories that deprived women of equality by denying their individuality in the putative interest of social integration, she opted for individualization as

at once a liberating and integrating force. Aware of the possible disintegrating effects of individualization, she conceived the relationship between individual and society as a non-reductive one. This was her alternative to Comte's system where women provided the moral 'sealing agent' of society and it led her to formulate what has since become the core problematic of modern sociology: the necessarily complex relation between the individual and society, or between agency and structure.

Since the French Revolution, the question of the social position of woman was integral to the question of interpreting and organizing the post-revolutionary social (Fraisse 1992: 49). That women appear in the 'classical' canon of sociology as the 'other' of the social is not to be ascribed to the forgetfulness of the classics, but has a systematic reason behind it. D'Héricourt's critique demonstrates that it is not the much cited 'blind spots' that caused the 'disappearance' of women from the discourse of sociology so bitterly resented by feminist scholars in the twentieth century. Instead the disappearance of women from the social is revealed by d'Héricourt as a deliberate 'social annihilation' of women. And this annihilation was constitutive of a sociological discourse that conceptualized society as a 'code word for the interests and needs of men' (Sydie 1987: 46; see also Marshall 1994). It was d'Héricourt's critique of precisely this masculinist coding of society and social theory which led her for her part to pose the question of the possibility of social order in a society of individuals in a manner that opens this question up as a distinctly sociological problematic. This gains her a place between Comte and Durkheim in terms of the history of sociological theory.

### **Annihilated: the contested foundations of a discipline**

A theory can be considered as a classical one when, as Luhmann argues, it poses a problem that continues as an open but essential question while the form in which this problem is expressed varies with the historical context (Luhmann 1996: 19f). As we have demonstrated in this chapter, both Martineau and d'Héricourt must surely qualify as sociological classics from this perspective – Martineau in respect of her methodological ideas, d'Héricourt in respect of her social-theoretical thinking, and both together in respect of their genuinely sociological thinking about the social construction of the differences between the sexes and the relationships between the sexes.<sup>11</sup>

The fact that they do not occupy a canonical position is a demonstration of the stubborn inertia of the masculinity of both the subject and the theoretical object of sociology. The 'social annihilation' of women was not only successfully secured within the now canonized classics of sociological discourse, which knows no female sociologists and codes the social as masculine, but has also made its indelible mark on the historical identity of the discipline,

which does not include feminist critique of early theories of society in its tradition. Hence it is not only the 'social annihilation' of women as possible subjects and objects of the discourse on the social, but also the 'historical annihilation' of the contested foundations of a masculinized sociology, that belongs to the history of the 'disciplining' of sociology.

### Acknowledgements

Translated by Gerald Dennett and Kirstie Tyler.

We should like to thank Judith Janoska and Claudia Honegger for encouraging us to study Harriet Martineau and Jenny P. d'Héricourt and having repeatedly given us their helpful support in uncovering the traces of these two pioneering women sociologists. We should also like to thank the participants in the Feminism and Social Theory Network meeting held in Ross Priory, 2002, who engaged us in deep and thoughtful discussions of this material.

### Notes

- 1 The following biographical details are mainly taken from Harriet Martineau's three-volume autobiography (1877), as well as from other sources (Clarke 1877; Katscher 1884; Bosanquet 1927; Pichanick 1980; Hill 1989; Hoecker-Drysdale 1992).
- 2 Durkheim follows Martineau in his *Rules of Sociological Method* ([1895] 1982) – sure enough without referring to her – in observing social facts as things. Yet Martineau went further than Durkheim, considering also the discourse of persons as an empirical data of social facts, while Durkheim used mainly statistical data to figure out social facts. Her suggestion leads to an empirical method that – as we would say today – could collect, measure and interpret the social world combining quantitative and qualitative research.
- 3 On the difference between virtual configurations of masculine/feminine and institutional configurations of men and women, see Chapter 1 (this volume).
- 4 Quotations from *La femme affranchie* by Jenny d'Héricourt (1860) are generally taken from the English translation dated [1864] 1981. Some of the citations used, however, are not to be found in the heavily abridged English version, and these parts are taken from the French original.
- 5 For a general review of Comte, see Pickering (1993); with regard to the inter-relationship between Comte's biography and his work from the perspective of constructing male/female identity, see Kofman (1978).
- 6 Hence it is not just contemporary feminists who deplore the metaphysical saturation of the meaning of woman in the sociological tradition (see Witz

- 2001; Chapter 1, this volume), but also feminist intellectuals of the period (see also Chapter 3, this volume).
- 7 See also Lepenies (1981b, 1988); on Comte's reception of biology, see Canguilhem (1981), McLaren (1981) and Vernon (1986).
- 8 And this, d'Héricourt states, is the case whenever social or cultural differences are reified by theory, 'whether in castes, in classes, or in sexes' (d'Héricourt [1864] 1981: 244).
- 9 For an analysis of French feminist discourse in the nineteenth century with relation to the discourse of individuality, see Scott (1996).
- 10 Practically nothing is known of the line from d'Héricourt through Renouvier to Durkheim. The possibility that Durkheim was aware of d'Héricourt's writing cannot, in any event, be excluded.
- 11 For a collection of portraits of 'female sociological classics' from a perspective of deconstructing and reconstructing the sociological tradition, see Honegger and Wobbe (1998).