« Il serait aisé d'appliquer aux femmes tout ce que j'ai dit des hommes » : Le Féminisme silencieux de Sophie de Grouchy

It is impossible to talk about feminism in the French Revolution and not encounter the name of the marquis de Condorcet. François Alphonse Aulard spawned this association at the turn of the twentieth century, as the terms 'féminisme' and 'féministe' were beginning to gain popularity in France, with an article in the *Revue Blanche* on Condorcet's 1790 text *Sur l'admission des femmes au droit de cité*.[1] The connection first made by Aulard remains potent to this day, with Guillaume Ansart recently describing Condorcet as 'the most articulate and consistent feminist voice during the Revolution'.[2] It is clear why Condorcet has become such a poster child for French Revolutionary feminism. Condorcet was one of the very few Revolutionary actors who explicitly and regularly advocated equal political rights for women[3]. His claim in 1788 that women should have 'absolument les mêmes' rights as men was reiterated in his famous *Sur l'admission des femmes*, which radically promoted the right of women to vote.[4] Given the marginality of Condorcet's position on women, some scholars have sought to find an explanation for it in his marriage to Sophie de Grouchy (1763-1822), Condorcet's wife

[1] FAURE Christine, « La naissance d'un anachronisme : le féminisme pendant la Révolution française », *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 344 (1 June 2006), p. 193–95.
[2] ANSART Guillaume,« "One Injustice Can Never Become a Legitimate Reason to Commit Another": Condorcet, Women's Political Rights, and Social Reform during the French Revolution (1789–1795) », *Intellectual History Review*, 25 August 2021, 1.
[3] Other notable figures who occupied this marginal 'feminist' position include Etta Palm d'Aelders (1743-1799), Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793), Pierre Guyomar (1757-1826), and Anne-Josèphe Théroigne de Méricourt (1762-1817). Although these actors were far from united in all their political views – Gouges, for example, remained a committed constitutional monarchist after Condorcet declared himself a republican – and therefore should not be seen as sharing precisely the same intellectual space, they all held that women should play an equal role to men in political society. Many of these figures, for example, including Gouges, Palm d'Aelders, and Théroigne de Méricourt, dedicated their energies to founding women's political clubs. In 1792, Théroigne de Méricourt went so far as to (unsuccessfully) petition the Legislative Assembly for a « bataillon d'amazones », a female counterpart to the National Guard, to be armed with pistols and sabres. MAZEAU Guillaume and PLUMAUZILLE Clyde, « Penser avec le genre: Trouble dans la citoyenneté révolutionnaire », *La Révolution française [En Ligne]* 9 (2015): para. 37; DEVANCE Louis, 'Le Féminisme pendant la Révolution française', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 49, no. 229 (1977): 371 ; 361-2.
[4] CONDORCET Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat de, « Essai sur la Constitution et les fonctions des assemblées provinciales, où l'on trouve un plan pour la Constitution & l'administration de la France », in *Oeuvres de Condorcet*, ed. CONDORCET O'CONNOR Arthur and ARAGO François, vol. 8 (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1847), 141 (hereafter OC); « Lettres d'un bourgeois de New-Heaven à un citoyen de Virginie, sur l'inutilité de partager le pouvoir législatif entre plusieurs corps », in *OC*, vol. 9, 1847, 15. WILLIAMS David, *Condorcet and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 161–71.

from 1786-1794. Sandrine Bergès, for example, who has done a great deal in recent years to return Grouchy to a significant position in the political and intellectual history of the French Revolution, has suggested that Grouchy may have been behind Condorcet's 'feminist' pronouncements.[5] Grouchy was certainly politically and intellectually active alongside her husband during the revolutionary period.[6] Indeed, she was frequently accused by contemporaries of manipulating her husband into acting as her radical revolutionary puppet: in 1792, for example, she was condemned in the Jacobin club of having 'blinded' Condorcet with her own political opinions.[7]

Yet for Grouchy to have pushed or persuaded Condorcet into making 'feminist' pronouncements, she must herself have held decided beliefs on the position of women in the polity. This fact is extremely difficult to establish. In none of her own published works – or those anonymous pieces that have subsequently been attributed to her by Bergès and others – does Grouchy make any pronouncements about women's rights.[8] Her *Lettres sur la sympathie* – the only philosophical text published under Grouchy's name in her lifetime, released in 1798 to accompany her translation of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) – contains

[5] BERGÈS Sandrine, « Sophie de Grouchy », in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. ZALTA Edward N. (Stanford: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2019), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/sophie-de-grouchy/; LAGRAVE Jean-Paul de, « L'Influence de Sophie de Grouchy sur la pensée de Condorcet », in *Condorcet: Mathématicien, économiste, philosophe, homme politique*, ed. CREPEL P. and GILAIN C. (Paris: Minerve, 1989), 434–42.

[6] STAËL Germaine de, *Dix Années d'exil*, ed. BALAYE Simone and BONIFACIO Mariella Vianello (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 50–52.

[7] ANON, « Séance du lundi 23 avril 1792 », *Journal des débats et de la correspondance de la Société des Amis de la Constitution*, 25 April 1792, 183 edition, 3. A similar claim was made by former friends of Condorcet, Amélie (1743-1830) and Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Suard (1732-1817), who suggested that Condorcet's 'intriguing and ambitious wife' drive the former marquis into his radical revolutionary career'. Quoted in BAKER Keith Michael, *Condorcet, from Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 26–27.

[8] The *Lettres sur la sympathie* has been recognized as Grouchy's work since its publication in 1798. Sandrine Bergès has further attributed to Grouchy two articles from the short-lived revolutionary journal *Le Républicain*, published in 1791: the « Lettre d'un jeune mécanicien aux auteurs du journal *Le Républician* » and (as partial author) « Observations sur le mémoire du roi ». In my own work, I have questioned these attributions, and attributed a number of other published and unpublished texts, including « Aux étrangers sur la revolution française » from *Le Républician*, and a 1793 series of articles from the revolutionary publication *Bulletin des amis de la Vérité*. See MCCRUDDEN Kathleen, « Fraternité, Liberté, Égalité: Sophie de Grouchy, Moral Republicanism, and the History of Liberalism, 1785-1815 » (PhD Dissertation, New Haven, Yale University, 2021), 391–94; BERGÈS Sandrine, « Sophie de Grouchy on the Cost of Domination in the Letters on Sympathy and Two Anonymous Articles in Le Republicain », *The Monist* 98, no. 1 (1 January 2015): 102–12.

only a few sentences that directly refer to women. Even leaving aside the question of her influence on Condorcet, this poses an intriguing historical question. As a high-profile woman in revolutionary circles, who was married to an outspoken advocate for women's rights, was a writer and thinker in her own right, and was the target of criticism for being too politically outspoken, it seems surprising that Grouchy didn't have an opinion of the position of women in French society. And yet, unlike Condorcet, she never expressed one. Why?

Taking my cue from the puzzle presented by Sophie de Grouchy, in this article I will explore how we can deal with such silences in intellectual history. I will not seek to answer the question of influence between Grouchy and Condorcet, or whether she was the *eminence grise* behind his 'feminist' pronouncements. Rather, I will focus on the more basic question prompted by her failure to speak on the subject of women: can this lack of speech itself be read as an argument, equivalent to the ones made explicitly by Condorcet? In Part One, drawing on recent scholarship from the field of contemporary gender and development studies that considers silence as a form of empowered resistance, I will explore whether silence can indeed be used as a way of expressing a constructive political vision, and how we can reconstruct these ideas from the silences of historical actors. In Part Two, I will apply the tentative methodology gleaned from this scholarship to the specific case of Grouchy. I will suggest that she did, in fact, have strongly held views on the moral and political role of women. In contrast to many of her contemporaries, who had a complementary understanding of the nature and roles of men and women, Grouchy believed that women possessed the same fundamental nature as men, and had the same ability to reach moral and political conclusions. They were therefore due an equal political role. However, Grouchy made this argument not through declarations, but through deliberate silences and omissions. In so doing, she was escaping the 'paradox' of revolutionary

'feminism' that has been described by Joan Scott.[9] Grouchy asserted the fundamental natural sameness of men and women once, and then refused to engage in any debate on behalf of women that might undermine this claim. In doing so, she was engaging *both* in a form of self-censorship, *and* in a positive attempt to forward her agenda by subverting the political discourses available to her. I will thus conclude, in Part Three, by suggesting that developing methodologies to read silences as arguments is essential for the evolution of the history of feminism.

A brief caveat before we begin. There has, of course, been a rich vein of scholarship on how, and indeed whether, we should treat 'feminism' as a coherent doctrine before the late nineteenth century.[10] Although so-called 'individualist' feminism – a doctrine that promoted equal rights as its ultimate goal – came to dominate the movement in the twentieth century, historians such as Karen Offen have suggested that a 'relational' feminism, which prioritised a companionate, non-hierarchical, and heterosexual couple, rather than the individual, as the basic unit of society, and did not necessarily call for men and women to be treated exactly the same under the law, held sway in earlier iterations.[11] The purpose of this article is to discern whether Grouchy was interested in making any sort of argument about the political role of women, and how she went about doing so through the use of silences. It is beyond the scope to dissect where, precisely, Grouchy's views lay on the spectrum of individualist to relational feminism, or to enter into the knotty question of how far it is appropriate to use the concept of 'feminism' in a French Revolutionary context at all. The term 'feminist', in quotation marks, will therefore here be applied in a general sense: indicating an investment in a significant political role for women.

[9] SCOTT Joan Wallach, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), x.
[10] OFFEN Karen, « Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach », *Signs* 14, no. 1 (1988): 119–57; COTT Nancy F., « Comment on Karen Offen's "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach" », *Signs* 15, no. 1 (1989): 203–5; Karen Offen, 'Reply to Cott', *Signs* 15, no. 1 (1989): 206–9.
[11] OFFEN, « Defining Feminism », 135–36; 139.

I.

The history of ideas in general, and the history of political thought in particular, is a discipline that has traditionally been based on the reading of words. Quentin Skinner, for example, when he set out in 1968 to revolutionize the discipline in his seminal 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', argued that there were two available methodologies when reading a text: to consider the context as determining its meaning, or to insist on the autonomy of the text itself. As is well known, Skinner wished to offer a third way: to discern the intention of the author of a text by 'trac[ing] the relations between the given utterance and [the] wider *linguistic* context as a means of decoding the action intention of the given writer'.[12] Skinner's methodological innovations, as well as those of fellow 'Cambridge School' scholars such as John Dunn and J.G.A. Pocock were greeted with enthusiasm, and the analysis of speech acts took centre stage.[13] Words and language are still at the centre of the discipline today, with intellectual historians focusing on 'the most complex explorations of the limits of language […] at a given time'.[14]

Yet what has received less notice in Skinner's oft-cited article is his discussion of the importance of the *lack* of words in historical texts to the discipline of intellectual history. In a few brief paragraphs, he argues for the value of paying attention not only to performative speech, but significant silences. As he put it, the '*failure* to use a particular argument may always be a polemical matter'. Using the example of Locke, Skinner suggests that the fact that he did not cite any historical arguments in his *Second Treatise On Civil Government* (1689) was worthy of note, as 'the discussion of political principles in seventeenth-century England

[12] SKINNER Quentin, « Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas », *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 49.
[13] WHATMORE Richard, *The History of Political Thought: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 67–83.
[14] BRETT Annabel, 'What Is Intellectual History Now?', in *What Is History Now?*, ed. CANNADINE David (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 127.

virtually hinged on the study of rival versions of the English past'. Thus, 'Locke's failure to mention these issues constituted perhaps the most radical and original feature of his whole argument'.[15] It was silence, not words, that made the strongest and most innovative political point. This argument is not controversial. There has long been a tradition of treating silence as an essential element of speech. Jacques Lacan, for example, argued in 1965 that silence is correlative to speech, and the capacity to express something without using words is a property of articulation.[16] Nevertheless, the study of silences throughout history as a means of expressing a political argument has not gained a great deal of ground since the 1960s. Can it simply not be done?

Recent scholarship in the field of contemporary gender and development studies suggest that it is, on the contrary, a potentially fruitful vein of research: particularly when it comes to uncovering the political views of women. Susan Gal has deconstructed the traditional dichotomy that places 'voice and the act of speaking' as 'an integral condition in the demonstration of women's empowerment', and silence as equivalent to 'passivity and powerlessness'.[17] Building on this insight, Jane L. Parapart and Cecile Jackson have demonstrated how women's silences, from Argentina, to Istanbul, Israel and Palestine, can be 'expressive': acting as a form of explicit political protest, a mechanism for renegotiating gender relations, and a collective challenge to oppressive regimes.[18] 'The researcher', Parapart insists,

[15] SKINNER, 'Meaning and Understanding', 47.
[16] DAHAN Patricia, « Le silence dans la psychanalyse », *Champ lacanien* 10, no. 2 (2011): 109.
[17] GAL Susan, « Between Speech and Silence: The Problematics of Research on Language and Gender », in *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era*, ed. LEONARDO Micaela di (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 175–203.
[18] Cecile Jackson's analysis, emerging from contemporary development studies, centres on a study of how subalterns, particularly the so-called 'Third World woman', 'speak'. She takes into account not only talk and testimony but also silence and embodied communication. Drawing examples from African, Maori, and Papuan contexts, she argues that '[r]ather than assuming that silence equals subordination, and that power adheres to gender categories, we should look for the resistant uses of both speech and silence, and ways of talking through the body'. PARAPART Jane L., « Choosing Silence: Rethinking Voice, Agency and Women's Empowerment », in *Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process: Feminist Reflections*, ed. RYAN-FLOOD R. and GILL R. (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 15–29; JACKSON Cecile, « Speech, Gender and Power: Beyond Testimony », *Development and Change* 43, no. 5 (2012): 999–1023.

'has to learn to read silence and dissembling by reconstructing discourse and texts […] paying attention to the unwritten, as well as what is "between the lines", or expressed as symbols and in procedures'.[19] Such a strategy can also be applied to historical texts, as well as in contemporary discourse. Taking the example of the anonymous memoir *Eine Frau in Berlin* (*A Woman in Berlin*, published in 1954 in English and 1959 in German), which details the horrific experiences of a German woman during the occupation of Berlin by the Red Army between April-June 1945, Parapart suggests that the refusal in the text to explicitly acknowledge the experience of rape was itself a means of expressing agency in extremely limited circumstances.[20] 'Speaking out', she argues, 'was not an option; judicious silence was a key survival strategy in a dangerous and brutal world – a strategy that may not have changed conditions, but did promote/enable healing and allowed some women to carry on'.[21]

Yet however promising these developments are for the study of silences in general, they beg two questions for the intellectual historian. Firstly, and most generally, can these insights be applied to intellectual history? Can silence be a means of expressing ideas as well as political action? Secondly, and more specifically, can silence be a method of expressing a constructive vision, as well as a form of resistance? To answer the first, we can already see useful scholarship in this vein emerging. Drawing explicitly on the work of Jackson, Tamar Hager asks why Mary Ryan (1848-1914), the maid and model of Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879), an early portrait photographer, stayed silent and failed to provide her own version of her life story, even when she achieved the social position to counter the rags-to-riches Cinderella story propagated by her patron. Hager interprets Ryan's silence as an act of protest. 'By choosing to respond to the existing stories', Hager argues, Ryan 'would have confirmed a

[19] PARAPART, « Choosing Silence », 24.
[20] The author was named in 2003 as Marta Hillers (1911-2001), a German journalist. HARDING Luke, « Row over Naming of Rape Author », *The Guardian*, 5 October 2003, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/oct/05/historybooks.germany.
[21] PARAPART, « Choosing Silence », 18.

discursive situation which failed to channel power in her favour. In such circumstances, staying silent was more effective, since it meant denouncing this discourse'.[22] Hager thus uses a lacuna in the archive to reconstruct Ryan's act of resistance to stratified Victorian society. Like Skinner's argument about Locke, Hager shows that Ryan constructed a social and political identity for herself through choosing not to engage with a particular discourse. Hager's work demonstrates how scholars can take the decisions that historical actors made about which languages *not* to use as indicative of thought. Although in the case of Ryan, this is restricted to an individual's ideas about their own personal standing in the world, this method could also be used to explore how figures embraced and rejected discourses to construct broader political visions.

The second question is, however, more complex. The literature that focuses on contemporary cases of women's silent activism is divided on whether silence can ever be an active political statement, or can only ever be a defensive move.[23] If the latter holds true, reading silences will always only ever have a limited place in the history of political thought: providing evidence of protest and resistance, but not of constructive ideas. The remainder of this article will explore this issue. Taking the example of Grouchy, I will suggest that we can, in fact, reconstruct original political thinking from silences. In Grouchy's case, failing to engage with a form of discourse implied not only a rejection of that discourse and its political implications, but a tacit embracing of its opposite. This, in turn, provided the foundation of her unspoken 'feminism'.

[22] HAGER Tamar, « Reconstructing Subjectivity from Silence: Julia Margaret Cameron, Mary Ryan and the Victorian Archive », *Women's History Review* 31, no. 5 (29 July 2022): 12.
[23] BLACKLOCK Cathy and CROSBY Alison, « The Sounds of Silence: Feminist Research across Time in Guatemala », in *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*, ed. GILES Wenona and HYNDMAN Jennifer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 45–72.

II.

Grouchy's *Lettres sur la sympathie*, published as they were in 1798 as an appendix to her translation of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, have, throughout the history of their reception, been described as little more than a 'complement' or a 'commentary' to Smith's treatise.[24] Yet the *Lettres* are in fact a combination of an analysis of Smith and other eighteenth-century thinkers, including Rousseau, Voltaire, and Locke; and a presentation of Grouchy's own complex philosophy about the link between the sentiment of sympathy and natural rights. What they are not, at least on the surface, are a treatise about women. Grouchy mentions 'femmes' five times in the whole of her *Lettres*. Almost all of the references are related in some way to a discussion of love.[25] This has led some scholars, such as Lena Halldenius, to suggest that Grouchy was simply not interested in developing an argument about women's position in the polity, and was happy to conform to 'the republican notion that civic virtue is an inherently male quality'.[26] Yet hints in Grouchy's private correspondence give the lie to her apparent apathy about the marginalised political position of women. In an argument with an anonymous interlocutor around 1789, Grouchy, defending the position that natural rights were inalienable and not the result of a social contract, put it to her correspondent: 'Si l'homme n'a de droits qu'en vertu d'une convention, il peut violer les droits de ceux qui ne sont point de sa société… L'esclavage des femmes est juste'.[27] Seemingly, a key significance of natural rights as opposed to conventional rights for Grouchy were that they belonged to – and protected – men and women alike. Equally, Grouchy was no shrinking violet when it came to active female participation in the political sphere. I have shown elsewhere that Grouchy was an essential

[24] *MERCURE FRANÇAIS*, 29 January 1798; WHATMORE Richard, « Adam Smith's Role in the French Revolution », *Past & Present* 175, no. 1 (1 May 2002): 87.
[25] CONDORCET Sophie, « Lettres sur la sympathie », in *Théorie des sentiments moraux […] [septième édition]*, by SMITH Adam, trans. CONDORCET Sophie, vol. II (Paris: Buisson, 1798), 398; 411; 486 (hereafter *LS*).
[26] HALLDENIUS Lena, « De Grouchy, Wollstonecraft, and Smith on Sympathy, Inequality, and Rights », *Australasian Philosophical Review* 3, no. 4 (2 October 2019): 385.
[27] ANON. to GROUCHY Sophie de, 'Lettre à Madame de Condorcet sur les droits de l'homme et du citoyen', n.d., fol. 237, Ms 870, F. 236-239, Bibliothèque de l'Institut. Although only Grouchy's correspondent's side of the argument remains extant, he or she helpfully quotes large sections of Grouchy's own argument.

element to Condorcet's political career from 1790-1794: ensuring his appointment as Commissioner of the Treasury in 1791, for example, as well as co-writing numerous journal articles and speeches with him.[28] Grouchy's political activities, moreover, continued long after Condorcet's 1794 death in the Terror. In response to her lover's, Jacques Joseph Garat (1767-1839), truculence in the face of her political determination, she told him that it was 'les hommes despotes et non la nature' who had declared that women should expend their talents on love rather than ambition.[29] Grouchy, therefore, seemed to think that women both had the same natural rights as men, and that, just like men, they had a role to play in politics.

With this in mind, it is worth returning to the few things that Grouchy did explicitly say about women in her *Lettres*. These are revealing. In a discussion about the necessity of beauty for love, she asserts that if women seem to care about good looks less than men, 'cela vient des idées morales de pudeur et de devoir qui les accoutument dès l'enfance … à leur préférer presque toujours certaines qualités'.[30] Grouchy is suggesting that there is no difference in the nature of men and women, and instead lays any apparent differences at the door of upbringing and socialisation. She later reiterates this point by quoting an unnamed philosopher in saying '*Les fautes des femmes sont l'ouvrage des hommes, comme les vices des peuples sont le crime de leurs tyrans*'.[31] In making this claim, Grouchy was positioning herself close to Condorcet's view. Indeed, Bergès and Eric Schliesser have argued that the anonymous philosopher Grouchy was citing was none other than Condorcet himself.[32] In his second *Lettre d'un bourgeois de New Haven* (1788), Condorcet argued that aside from pregnancy, childbirth and breast-feeding,

[28] MCCRUDDEN, « Fraternité, Liberté, Égalité », 100–174.
[29] GROUCHY to GARAT, in CONDORCET Sophie de, *Lettres sur la sympathie: suivies des lettres d'amour*, ed. LAGRAVE Jean Paul de (Montréal: Etincelle, 1994), 209.
[30] CONDORCET, *LS*, 398–99.
[31] Ibid., 485. Emphasis in original.
[32] They suggest that the quotation is a misquoted and out of context reference to Condorcet's 'Éloge de M. Hunter' (1783). GROUCHY Sophie de, *Letters on Sympathy: A Critical Engagement with Adam Smith's The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. SCHLIESSER Eric and BERGÈS Sandrine, trans. BERGÈS Sandrine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 141, n. 13. See CONDORCET, « Éloge de M. Hunter », in *OC*, vol. 2, 1847, 664.

all other differences between men and women were simply 'ouvrage de l'éducation'.[33] It was this idea – that women were moral and political individuals in precisely the same way as men – that underpinned his logic in 1790 that they 'ont nécessairement des droits égaux'.[34] It should be noted that although the *Lettres* were not published until 1798, recent archival research suggests that they were likely first drafted between 1786-9: in other words, the period of their early marriage, when Condorcet was starting to develop this defence of female personhood.[35]

This argument, that women were in their fundamental nature the same as men, was a radical one because it constituted a rejection of the 'complementarity' model of male-female relations. In late eighteenth-century Francophone thought, this perspective had famously been expressed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his *Émile* (1762), Rousseau had argued that 'women and men are in every respect related and in every respect different'. He suggested that fundamental differences in the 'nature' of men and women led them to be suited for distinct, but complementary roles within a relationship, so that their coupling would lead to a complete 'moral person of which the woman is the eye and the man is the arm'.[36] This led Rousseau to argue that women should be kept out of the political sphere, in order to provide feminine moral oversight that was separated from the messy and physical world of politics.[37] The 'complementarity' model was extremely influential in revolutionary discourse. Pierre Louis Roederer (1754-1835), for example, who was in other respects a close intellectual and political ally of Grouchy throughout the 1790s, argued in his 1793 'Cours d'organisation sociale' that 'l'homme et la femme font partie l'un de l'autre; ce sont deux moitiés d'un même tout'. Therefore, he argued with Rousseauean logic, as the *père de famille* represented his whole

[33] CONDORCET, « Lettres d'un bourgeois de New-Heaven », 18.
[34] CONDORCET, « Sur l'admission des femmes au droit de cité », in *OC*, vol. 10, 1847, 122.
[35] MCCRUDDEN, « Fraternité, Liberté, Égalité », 41–47.
[36] ROUSSEAU Jean-Jacques, *Emile, or On Education*, trans. BLOOM Allan (London: Penguin, 1991), 357; 377.
[37] SONENSCHER Michael, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Division of Labour, the Politics of the Imagination and the Concept of Federal Government* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 137.

household, women neither needed nor had any right to political participation.[38] It is true that this discourse of complementarity did not necessarily lead to total female exclusion from the political sphere. A culture of 'civisime maternel', which emphasized the role of women in bearing and educating new generations of patriots, led to wives and mothers being the principal beneficiaries of legislation aiming at the reduction of inequality from 1789, and particularly during the years of the republican National Convention (1793-4).[39] Nevertheless, this political role was predicated on the idea that women could play a special and different function as moral arbiters: an idea that stemmed from a complementary view of gender relations.

Grouchy, by asserting that everything in her *Lettres* applied equally to men as to women, was taking the opposite position. Importantly for our purposes, moreover, is the way in which she staked this ground. She stated that although it may seem like her treatise was only about men, 'il serait aisé d'appliquer aux femmes tout ce que j'ai dit des hommes'.[40] Men and women share the same fundamental nature. Once stated, there was no need to repeat this fact. Assume everything I say applies to women too, Grouchy seemed to be telling her readers, and we can continue without further ado. And so she did: without mentioning women again. She went on to use the rest of her treatise to demonstrate how the 'individu', by applying reason to the natural sentiment of sympathy, could come to an understanding of both morality and natural rights. These understandings, she argued, were at the basis of both the social and the political community.[41] The 'loix [sic]', she wrote, 'devraient être le supplément de la conscience du citoyen', and maintained that if the 'ordre social, en conservant aux hommes leurs droits

[38] ROEDERER Pierre Louis, « Cours d'organisation sociale », in *Oeuvres du comte Pierre Louis Roederer*, ed. ROEDERER A.-M., vol. 8 (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1859), 245; cf VERJUS Anne, *Le Bon Mari: une histoire politique des hommes et des femmes (1780-1804)* (Paris: Fayard, 2010).
[39] MAZEAU and PLUMAUZILLE, « Penser avec le genre », paras 14–15.
[40] CONDORCET, *LS*, 486.
[41] MCCRUDDEN, « Fraternité, Liberté, Égalité », 48–61; 74–93; MALHERBE Michel, 'Justice et société chez Sophie de Grouchy', in *Les Lettres sur la sympathie (1798) de Sophie de Grouchy, philosophie morale et réforme sociale*, ed. BERNIER Marc André and DAWSON Diedre (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2010), 151–65; SCHLIESSER Eric, « Sophie de Grouchy, Adam Smith, and the Politics of Sympathy », in *Feminist History of Philosophy: The Recovery and Evaluation of Women's Philosophical Thought*, ed. O'NEILL Eileen and LASCANO Marcy P. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 193–219.

naturels', by allowing reason and sympathy to flourish, 'les mettrait donc dans la position la plus capable de les porter à les respecter entr'eux, ces droits seraient alors garantis par l'intérêt du bonheur et de la tranquillité de chaque individu, plus encore que par les loix'.[42] Although using 'homme' and 'individu' interchangeably here, her earlier statement makes it clear that Grouchy saw these rights as belonging equally to men and women, and the responsibility for maintaining the political and social order as falling equally upon both sexes. She was making a powerful argument by refusing to use the word woman at all. A crucial element of her political theory was thus constructed through silence.

Yet why did Grouchy chose this style of argumentation? Why did she not stand beside her husband, and explicitly argue for the equal political status of men and women? Jackson draws a distinction between women remaining silent due to their alienation from hegemonic language and their fear of being punished for any attempt to protest, and silence as a form of public opposition, denoting a rejection of social, political and gender opposition. The former, Jackson argues, can result in loss of agency.[43] I suggest that the best way to read Grouchy's refusal to discuss women as a combination of the two. Firstly, the reaction to women in the public sphere in France – particularly those explicitly arguing for the rights of women, and particularly as the Revolution wore on – became more and more hysterical. In the spring of 1793, Théroigne de Méricourt (1762-1817), who had campaigned for the right for women to bear arms, was beaten in front of the doors of the Convention by militant radicals, and in October of that year all women's political clubs were prohibited.[44] Grouchy had received her fair share of abuse in the royalist press for her political activities. Pornographic caricatures of

[42] CONDORCET, *LS*, 478; 494.
[43] JACKSON, « Speech, Gender and Power ».
[44] GODINEAU Dominique, « Femmes et violence dans l'espace politique révolutionnaire », *Historical Reflections / Réflexions historiques* 29, no. 3 (2003): 574. It is worth noting that Godineau points out that, in fact *female* violence was given as one of the reasons for this prohibition. See also MAZEAU and PLUMAUZILLE, « Penser avec le genre », para. 32.

her were gleefully depicted.[45] On 16 May 1792, in the context of the formation of the so-called Brissotin ministry, the royalist *Journal de la cour et de la ville* asked:

> Puisqu'il est impossible de trouver des hommes capables d'occuper long-tems la place de ministres, pourquoi ne pas choisir des femmes ? Pourquoi ne pas recourir à mesdames […] Condorcet, Téroigne [sic], etc ? elles ont assez de talens pour être *femmes publiques* […][46]

The term 'femme publique' carried overtones of prostitution, a theme that was repeated in many *Journal de la cour* articles on Grouchy.[47] It is likely, therefore, that Grouchy was influenced by the threat of mockery, contempt, and even violence if she expressed her views on the identical nature of women openly.

Yet Grouchy had caused these reactions in part *because* she was outspoken. In July 1791, following Louis XVI's failed attempt to flee Paris on the night of 20-21 June she, alongside Condorcet – and possibly also Jacques Pierre Brissot (1754-1793), Achille du Chastellet (1759-1794), Thomas Paine (1737-1809), and Étienne Clavière (1735-1793) – had launched a short-lived pro-Republican journal entitled *Le Républicain*.[48] Moreover, her participation – editing the journal, and likely contributing articles – was well known.[49] In August, Grouchy wrote to her friend Étienne Dumont (1759-1829) – who had rapidly disassociated himself from the provocative publication – that 'nos tyrans', having 'entre les mains la Constitution', constantly 'nous menac[ent] de nous arrêter'.[50] Grouchy was prepared to risk arrest to speak out on some political issues. Her failure to speak out on the subject of women cannot, therefore, wholly be laid at the door of self-censorship.

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[45] 2 July 1791, SYONNET Jacques Louis Gautier de, ed., « Journal de la cour et de la ville », 1792 1789; François Marchant, *La Jacobinéide, poëme héroï-comi-civique* (Paris: unknown, 1792), 15; « Correspondance littéraire secrète », 30 July 1791.
[46] 16 May 1792, Syonnet, « Journal de la cour et de la ville », 125.
[47] See, for example, 25 August 1791, « Journal de la cour et de la ville »; PLUMAUZILLE Clyde, *Prostitution et Révolution. Les Femmes publiques dans la cité républicaine (1789-1804)* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 2016).
[48] For membership of the 'Société des Républicains', see MCCRUDDEN, « Fraternité, Liberté, Égalité », 383–84.
[49] BERGES, « Sophie de Grouchy on the Cost of Domination »; MCCRUDDEN, « Fraternité, Liberté, Égalité », 122–24.
[50] GROUCHY to DUMONT (August 1791), reproduced in MARTIN Jean, « Achille du Chastellet et le premier mouvement républicain en France d'après les lettres inédites (1791-1792) », *La Révolution française* 80 (1927): 112.

I suggest, therefore, that Grouchy, in arguing through silence, was seeking to side-step the issue that confronted other women who sought to advocate for women's equal moral and political individuality to men during this period. This has most famously been explored by Joan Scott, in her seminal 1996 *Only Paradoxes to Offer*. As Scott has put it, in order to 'protest women's exclusion on the basis of the idea that sexual difference was not an indicator of social, intellectual, or political capacity', women had to 'act on behalf of women and so invoked the very difference they sought to deny'.[51] By instead discussing 'individuals' – who she labelled as non-gendered – Grouchy avoided this problem. In doing so, she was, in fact, embracing and distorting the very logic of non-speech that led to the gradual suppression of formal female political engagement during the French Revolution on its head. Anne Verjus has argued that we should 'speak of non-inclusion rather than exclusion' when it comes to female suffrage in the French Revolution.[52] The question was simply not addressed: the male gender of citizenship was largely implicitly assumed rather than proudly declared. Grouchy, through her near-silence on the subject of women, used a rhetoric of non-exclusion. If everything she said could be applied to women, their inclusion in any statement about the formation and maintenance of the political sphere must, in turn, be a given. Her strategy of silence was thus not only self-censorship, but an active attempt to subvert the prevailing contemporary discourse. She inserted her own implied orthodoxy – that of the equal nature of men and women – in place of the implicit language of complementarity. This was a far more radical move than simply resistance.

The Janus-faced nature of Grouchy's strategy – both defensive and assertive – can best be understood when we consider the broader context of attempts made by women during the French revolutionary period to carve out a space in the political sphere. As we have heard,

[51] Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer*, x.
[52] VERJUS Anne, « Gender, Sexuality, and Political Culture », in *A Companion to the French Revolution*, ed. MCPHEE Peter (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2013), 201.

explicit claims for women to share in equal political rights with men – such as those made by Condorcet – were extremely rare. Yet as the work of Dominique Godineau, Clyde Plumauzille, Suzanne Desan, Katie Jarvis and others have shown, even if women were denied the right to suffrage during the majority of the Revolutionary period – and officially from 1791 – they were not excluded from citizenship as a whole. In many instances they leveraged the minimal rights that this status gave, as well as their traditional social roles – as the oral record-keepers of neighbourhoods, as instigators of and participants in economic protests, and especially as wives and mothers – to gain some measure of participation in the political sphere.[53] The exclusion of women was never absolute, and many worked within the fluctuating system of restrictions in which they were enmeshed to carve out spaces of political agency. We should approach Grouchy's use of silence with a similar degree of ambivalence. She was aware that she was operating in a constrained space, and obeyed those constraints by pre-empting suppressive action against her speech. Yet her silence was not pure self-censorship. It was also an active strategy: a rejection of a gendered discourse meant stepping outside, as far as she was able, the boundaries of that space. By refusing to play the game of using gendered language, she was not just shielding herself from criticism, she was also making a constructive point: that a Rousseauean discourse was inadequate for explaining the natures, and thus the moral and political capacities of men and women. Like many women, she was both working within, and pushing at, the boundaries that constrained her.

[53] MAZEAU and PLUMAUZILLE, « Penser avec le genre »; VERJUS, *Le Bon Mari*; DESAN Suzanne, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); JARVIS Katie, *Politics in the Marketplace Work, Gender, and Citizenship in Revolutionary France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); GODINEAU Dominique, *Citoyennes tricoteuses: les femmes du peuple à Paris pendant la Révolution française* (Paris: Perrin, 2004).

III.

The example of Sophie de Grouchy demonstrates that positive political thought can be produced through silence: by rejecting certain discourses, implicitly embracing others, and allowing the consequences of these decisions to permeate the remainder of a text. Moreover, such ideas can be read by historians. Care must, of course, be taken. This is not a call to invent ideas where there is no evidence that any existed. Yet in cases like Grouchy – where context and evidence heavily suggest engagement with a topic that is nevertheless missing from her writings – reading the silences in her work is a productive endeavour. It is particularly important for reconstructing the thought of women in the past. The history of gender has taught us that women found innovative ways to work in restricted spaces, and development scholarship argues that one of the ways that contemporary women do so today is through a lack of speech. By combining these two insights, and turning our attention not only to points made and language wielded, but arguments *not* called upon and discourses *discounted*, we can, as intellectual historians, add another methodological tool to our arsenal. As Michelle Perrot has argued, 'un profond *silence* enveloppe l'existence […] des femmes' in the historical record.[54] Even women like Grouchy, who were in a position to leave written traces behind them, did not always 'speak' on the subject of women in the way we might expect or desire them to have done so. Reading Grouchy's 'silent feminism' demonstrates how we may be able to turn this quiet to our advantage: and find in it, instead of a lack, a new and fruitful resource. Outspoken figures like Condorcet will, rightly, remain central to the study of historical feminism. But deprived of the arguments of those like Grouchy, who spoke without words, we will be left with only half the picture.

[54] PERROT Michelle, « Histoire des femmes et féminisme », *Journal francais de psychiatrie* 40, no. 1 (2011): 6.

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