The I, the Eye and the Orifice.

An interview with Catherine Millet

The position of a woman as the object at a male orgy has always been a presence signifying only as orifice; a site without subjectivity around which male pleasure is organised and virility enacted for the gaze of other men. But what happens if the focal point shifts? If in lieu of this psychasthenia the body of a woman in an orgy becomes the focal point around which space is organised? And what if the woman then gives voice to this focal point articulating both its gaze and its pleasures? Catherine Millet makes such a shift in her sexual autobiography The Sexual Life of Catherine M., but critical responses to the text have shown little interest in the book’s re-spatialisation of sexual relations.

Many of the English-speaking reviewers of The Sexual Life of Catherine M. have been unable to resist dabbling in the semantic field of the slut. Jokes, double entendres, and aspersions about Miller’s sexual appeal litter the reviews with an unapologetic sleaziness that takes one back to the schoolyard. How tawdry these reviews are in comparison with Miller’s decidedly unpornographic exploration of a sexual life lived outside the rules. It would be easy to dismiss Miller’s autobiography as one of the many products of porno-chic emanating from France that chronicle – and often
idealise – the contemporary popularization of sexual practices that
decentre the couple. Many reviewers link Millet’s name to the
award winning and best-selling writer Michel Houellebecq and
certainly, Millet shares with Houellebecq a refusal to idealise the
sexual liberation movements of the past. But *The Sexual Life of
Catherine M.* is a far cry from Houellebecq’s world-weary polemics
against the twentieth century’s social and sexual liberation move-
ments and his paradoxical advocacy of swinging as a panacea for the
male ego jaded from decades of feminism. As numerous critics have
pointed out Millet casts a cool eye on these practices. Cool but not
critical, and perhaps this is why many of her reviewers have lapsed
into pornographic chatter. It’s the very absence of advocacy, ideali-
sation, criticism or pornographic heat that makes *The Sexual Life of
Catherine M.* a singular text.

What strikes you about Catherine Millet when you meet her is
how warm she is – for a Parisian she’s bursting out of her skin. Millet
is the Foundation Editor of the distinguished art journal *Art Press*;
I expected Parisian *hauteur* but found instead a woman full of mirth.
Her *Art Press* office is covered with sketches of a proffered bottom
(presumably hers) and while the generosity of this bottom is described
at length in *The Sexual Life of Catherine M.*, you get little sense in the
book of the warmth and generosity of the woman.

I arrived at the interview armed with a series of questions moti-
vated by my intellectual provenance: psychoanalysis and feminism, but
there was a secret provenance motivating the interview. Long before I’d
discovered feminism or psychoanalysis I’d discovered groups of men
who liked to fuck in packs. Growing up in Newcastle in the seventies,
I learnt tough lessons in sexual propriety. Not that there was any. Girls
who played too openly were punished on toilet walls with lurid
descriptions of their sexual games. But the really tough pleasures were
never spoken about. How many of my schoolgirl friends ended up in
one of those throw and catch moments when the boys tossed flesh from
one boy to another. How many ended up at the wrong end of a queue.
On their backs, legs held apart when the Christian Fellowship boys, or
the surfy boys or any other of those innumerable gangs of young men
got out of control. Today we’d call those behind the scenes scuffles –
gang rape – but back then we didn’t have the words to name what happened to girls who behaved like boys.

Reading Millet’s autobiography I was reminded of a girl I went to school with; a girl always to be found in the company of boys and men. I remember her as a plump and not particularly attractive girl but I suspect that this image is a memory lag, a way of seeing still caught in the mythologies of its time. The truth is I don’t really know anything about her but what I do remember (with a residue of shocked awe) are the trousers she wore to parties. They had a zipper that started at the front and continued on all the way around to the back and she would demonstrate how you could open them from either side. What separated her from the rest of my schoolgirl friends was that she made no secret of her enjoyment of sex. I sat with her in science where she would regale us with stories of her weekend adventures in which these fantasmatic trousers were forever falling open. She had a curious innocence, an unawareness that her delight in the new territory she was exploring was differently experienced by the rest of us. That furtive double act of schoolgirl sex in the seventies – doing and denying – was a game she didn’t seem to know anything about. While we lived in fear of our doing being named she generated constant and joyous narratives of pleasure and seemed completely unafraid of the label we all feared acquiring. Whatever you did on Saturday night, whatever the boys did to you when they got out of control – what mattered was that nobody gave it a name. To be written up as a ‘slut’ on the toilet wall could finish you in the playground.

My friend of the fantasmatic trousers seemed to dwell outside these rules and sanctions that kept the rest of us on the inside of femininity. And like my school friend, Millet is simply unconcerned by – what to her are – the mores of ‘bourgeois’ society. Meeting Millet made me wonder if both these women were ‘out of season’? Women who discovered something that was intrinsically theirs – the pleasuring potential of their bodies and who went out joyfully in search of others with whom to share this pleasure? Had they – decades before their time – opened a path for a female sexual pleasure untrammeled by the colonising and moralising penetrations of men? Harbouring bad memories of men in packs I wanted to retrieve Millet’s text from the pornographic
chatter of the critics in order to understand how cultural meaning could be frozen from such an event. I wanted to understand how a woman could be fucked by groups of boys – or men – and escape an identification with any of the pejorative meanings attached to being an orifice in free circulation. Could one occupy the site of an orifice at an orgy and access pleasure rather than abjection? And if so, did one do it intact or was there a sacrifice of feminine identity or of meaning 

tout court.

Millet describes with a brilliant precision a sexual life devoted to numbers. As a child she contemplated the problem of numbers. ‘Could a woman have several husbands at the same time, or only one after the other? In which case how long did she have to stay married to each one before she could change? What would be an acceptable number of husbands: a few, say five or six, or many more than that, countless husbands?’\(^1\) She finds her answer to these questions in the evolution of a highly orchestrated sexual practice, choreographed by her male friends, but which nevertheless enables her to pursue her enjoyment of numbers of men. What is so marked about Millet’s account of this practice is that she eschews any discussion of the negative symbolic surrounding a woman who has sex with many men at the same time. Nor does she enter into any introspection about the possible emotional or physical damage involved in such a practice. When I point out that she is writing from a position where traditionally women mustn’t go, she laughs and responds, ‘Are you sure?’ Evidently I am wrong because she has gone there, with pleasure, and lived to tell the tale. Sex, Millet, tells me is ‘an empty pocket’ you can put what you like inside:

When I was eighteen years old, many of my friends of the same age thought that the sexual act had a certain value; it was for example a proof of love, and ‘to make love’, to have a sexual relation had this signification. It is a proof of love that one gives to the other. Me… I’ve never attributed this signification to the sexual act. And if you don’t attribute a precise signification to the sexual act there is no reason for you not to do this thing with whoever presents themselves… For me the sexual act is a pocket that is empty of sense. It’s empty. It’s empty. And you can put what you want there. The majority of people put love there. Other people put money there. There are those who put success in society or their profession there. You can put whatever you want in this empty pocket. And you can put pleasure there! Voilà!
My interview with Millet has many moments – lost in translation – when I stumble over my own intransigence in accepting this idea of sex as an empty pocket. Trained in psychoanalysis I am used to looking for unconscious fantasies and discourses\(^2\) that insist wordlessly – over decades and through generations. That is why I’ve never been convinced by the fluid untracked bodies one finds – say in the writing of the later Foucault – bodies that are able to create themselves as zones of pleasure that transcend repressive cultural practices and discourses. What one finds in psychoanalysis is that subjects are far less plastic, meaning far more intransigent, and that practices and acts seized on as ‘liberational’ are often just painful stumblings around the vast space of one’s interior silences. This is why psychoanalysis – despite its legendary blindness – continues to be a touchstone for subjective truth. Interestingly, Millet is similarly unimpressed by liberational rhetoric about sex.

Both as an intellectual and as a woman – in the intimate relations I’ve had with the men I’ve met in my life – I’ve learnt that one never says the truth in relation to sexuality…in my milieu, which in the period of the sexual revolution was very militant and liberal there was the tendency to ‘hedoniser’ everything to do with sexuality and to reject everything that could serve the cause of the puritans. In defence against the puritan spirit there was the tendency to present sexuality only in a positive light. I was part of a generation for which sexual blossoming was part of an obligatory happiness and obviously, in the course of my life, I became aware that this wasn’t true. I believe that I went very far both in the pursuit of liberty and in putting liberty to the test but I was also able to recognise that this hedonistic philosophy was flawed. And as I have said often, I wanted to counter this ideologically dominated sexual discourse with personal experience. Therefore the book is the opposite of fiction. As I say at one point in the book, I wanted to tell the truth, and of course truth is in quotation marks, but that was my motivation.

But Millet’s ‘truth’ is not the psychoanalytic truth of restoring to discourse the often bizarre and distorted meanings one gives to events that are not properly symbolically assimilated. Her truth is to refuse \textit{all} meanings associated with the site of her sexual practice. In her narration this is a meaningless zone; a zone of the real where bodies without
subjectivity intersect in a kind of emotionless sentience of taste, physical sensation and friction. Here, even the imaginary is relegated to the shadows. From a psychoanalytic point of view one could say that Millet’s jouissance involves an excess of the real. While she can remember the names of only fifty men she has had sex with, she remembers the organs of countless others – sex machines that afford her pleasure by stroking her body and penetrating her vagina, anus and mouth.

Writing about these moments of multiple penetrations Millet uses a style which is cool, precise and unreflective, except on the subject of pleasure: ‘I was happy simply to discover that the delicious giddiness I felt at the ineffably soft touch of a stranger’s lips, or when a hand fitted itself over my pubis, could be experienced an indefinite number of times because the world was full of men predisposed to do just that.’ It’s this cool eye that produces a text one could best describe as an ethnography of libertine culture. As ethnographer, Millet sits outside the bodies in sexual play and observes their acts; and as the body at the center of these acts she observes and records its pleasures. This is why the text is not pornographic – or erotic. There is no characterisation, no subject that would allow readers to hang a sexual fantasy on Catherine Millet and thus return her to a recognisable status within the enculturated meaning of woman in an orgy. Think of O, who in the Histoire d’O delights in her various experiences of passivity, degradation and subjective annihilation or Sade’s Justine, who endlessly protests her moral indignation at all that is done to her. In both texts traits of character are central to the reader’s interpellation into the text’s fantasy structure. The Sexual Life of Catherine M. elicits the same ennui produced by these representations of endlessly repeated sexual acts but there is no interpellation into their enjoyment. Millet is no O and certainly no Justine; she simply isn’t there except as a recorder of her own pleasure.

Sometimes here in France in the press it’s been said that I’ve produced a work of entomology. An entomologist is someone who studies insects…And in a certain way I agree. I was reading in a scientific magazine, a woman specialising in primates who studied the life of monkeys and who cited my book. She was interested in it because, apparently, she had found the sexuality I described in
certain highly evolved primates. She concluded in relation to my work that what she found interesting was that I had a scientific approach. And that’s correct in relation to my motivation from the beginning... In fact I didn’t know what the message of the book would be exactly. I began with the innocence of a scientist who has before their eyes a milieu to study, and who, in order to be attentive and to observe everything that happens properly, must not have a prior perceptual grid, a prior apprehension of the ideas they intend to apply. I believe that in relation to myself and to my circle – to those that I had sexual relations with – I put myself in a scientific situation. And when the critics have said ‘but its very cold writing’, ‘one has the impression that she speaks of someone else’, ‘it’s too un-emotional,’ I agree. It is cold, there is very little sentiment and I speak of myself as of another person because I put myself, in a certain fashion, behind the microscope.

In this desubjectivised recording something happens to the way we see the men who are before the microscope. Who are these men? We never know; and yet they seem to be ever at hand. ‘I had found a space on one of those concrete benches with a really rough, grainy surface. A group had formed: I had the groins of three or four men around my head, wanting me to take them in my mouth, but I could also catch glimpses of the pale hands of the outer circle as they traced their rhythmic actions on their dicks in the darkness, like coiled springs quivering to the touch. Behind them there were a few more shadows looking on.’

This is not the eye of erotic or pornographic literature that watches a woman-object being multiply penetrated. Millet’s eye sees, names and abstracts. Instead of gazing inward at the body of the woman spread-eagled for the pleasure of men, the eye looks outward at the queue of men, at the men emerging from the shadows to take their place in the queue, at the endless supply of nameless, faceless men standing waiting to unzip and afford this woman her pleasure.

One of the effects of this inversion is to equalise the sexual game. We see faceless men involved in a sexual drama that strips its characters – of character. If there are pejorative cultural values to be attributed to this drama Millet is certainly not their sole recipient. And pointedly, there is one of her and many of them. And they keep coming. Out of woods, car parks, offices and nightclubs. Working-class men drawn from the street and libertine elites from the haute
bourgeoisie. Such men have rarely been spotlighted with the candour
Millet turns on them and it’s a spotlight that comes with the authority
of her being ‘bien connu’, the Editor of France’s most prestigious art
journal. When Millet describes in detail the acts of sex she has with
many different colleagues who have fucked her at odd moments in the
office, she opens a view on the secret life of men and inverts the gaze –
from which male sexual pragmatism is always seen within the spectrum
of phallic empowerment – to cast this sexual pragmatism in a new
light. Millet’s men are objects in space fulfilling their role in a sexual
dramaturgy that does not require their subjectivisation. They are simply
body parts. Her lens expands and retracts so that we see both the
dramaturgy of the scene and its isolated instances of performance. We
focus on a cock performing its act, and the next…and the next…and
the only agency in this dramaturgy is that of the woman, who sees and
narrates. What is interesting about this is that the scenario of group sex
loses its power to connote masculinity as a dominant force. Spatial
relations change. The men thus described, become part objects in an
endless chain. Lacan calls this the metonymic chain of desire but while for
Lacan women are the objects in this chain, each part insufficient for
male desire, which is always slipping to the next object, here Millet’s
orifice is the subject whose desire always slips. There is an unstated
mirth running through this representation, a triumph at having
escaped that constant feminine fear of sudden cessation; in her sexual
pageantry no one cock is sufficient but there is always another cock at
hand. Millet doesn’t want to know these men, she wants to have them;
and in writing her Sexual Life she has them far more than they have her.
The phallus, in short, has had its comeuppance.

Reflecting on this, Millet understands this inversion of sexual
domination as an effect of the act of writing rather than to the reality
of the actual practice. It’s an after-effect achieved from being the one in
control of the act of representing.

Let me ask if the effect that you have described isn’t an effect of the writing
itself? That is to say…I inscribed myself in this human chain made of men,
and I am the woman who hooked herself into this chain. But even the fact of
describing this chain – that is to say in writing the book and in putting it in
perspective – in fact it’s me who ends up being the organiser of it all. It’s me who puts everyone in their place. And it’s me who...well I think that even if I have described situations where I have shown that I have been instrumentalised by the men that I frequented, I was more or less conscious of this. Perhaps not when I was eighteen years old, but at thirty I had become conscious that I was being instrumentalised by the men I associated with. And I accepted it. I believe that what has come to pass is an effect (of writing) because I’ve been capable of understanding what happened and then of writing it. It’s me who in a certain sense today instrumentalises them. I sincerely think that there is more an act of instrumentalisation in the act of writing than in the act of sexuality itself. In France, if you use this expression ‘to instrumentalise others’ it signifies that you are – as a woman, for example – a manipulator, a player. Possibly in playing with your seduction you are in a situation of mastery. You search for mastery in a situation, and in searching for this mastery, for this dominant position, it can imply a certain mistrust of others. I don’t believe this is the case for me. I believe I have taken my pleasure more from being manipulated than in searching to manipulate others. Therefore if there is on my part an instrumentalisation of men I think it’s an effect of writing and of having made these men, and what I have known of them, characters in a book.

Here there are two women. Catherine Millet the woman who is ‘instrumentalised’ by men and Millet the writer who achieves mastery through the act of representation. When we look more closely at the young woman who is – Millet later acknowledges – made use of by men, we find a girl whose identity is caught up with the men in the game, in being one of them and who – like a junior member of a male hierarchy – wants to do whatever will secure her position in the group. Describing her first group-sex scene we have the impression of a girl who just falls in. She is with a group of friends beside a swimming pool when one of the boys suggests they take their clothes off and have a swim.

‘I heard André saying his girlfriend wouldn’t be bashful in coming forwards... but in the end no one made it into the water... the next set of images that come back to me are in a bedroom, me nestled in a tall, cast-iron bed, all I can see through the metal bars are the brightly lit walls, aware of the other girl lying on a divan in one corner of the room. André fucked me first, quite
slowly and calmly, as was his manner. He stopped abruptly. I was overcome with an ineffable feeling of anxiety, just long enough to see him moving away, walking slowly, his back arched, towards the other girl. Ringo came and took his place on top of me, while the third boy...'

There is something terribly sad about this passage describing a young girl behind the iron bars of a bed suffering a deluge of anxiety that is only calmed by a new boy filling in the place of the boyfriend who has delivered her to his mates. How Catherine Millet (the girl) makes sense of these moments of anxiety or embarrassment is to forge an identity with the boys in which her difference – her femininity – is erased from her own understanding of her place in the game. ‘In Paris I had the friend I had made love to first, Claude, and he seemed to be in love with a bourgeois girl who could utter such poetic sentences as ‘touch my breasts, they’re so soft this evening’, without letting him go any further. This example had, quickly, if rather confusingly, taught me that I could not be classed as a great seductress, and that my place was therefore not so much amongst the women, facing the men, but alongside the men.’

Throughout the text Millet aligns herself with the men, seeing herself as an increasingly distinguished player in a game of men; one who excels by how well she plays their game. When I ask about this male identification she has no hesitancy in affirming it:

*You have a masculine identification?*
*Yes. Yes, that’s right, yes...*

Millet represents herself often – through the eyes of others – and at a distance, from the detached point of view of the second person. From this perspective she is seen as an exemplary player: ‘You never said no, never refused anything. You didn’t make a fuss; ‘You were far from inert, but you weren’t demonstrative either’; ‘You did things so naturally, you were neither reticent nor dirty, just a tad masochistic from time to time’; ‘At an orgy, you were always the first, right out there’; ‘I remember Robert would send a taxi for you as if there was some emergency and you would go’; ‘People thought of you as some sort of phenomenon; even with an incredible number of guys you would still be the same right up to the end, at their mercy...you
were a mate who happened to be a girl.'6 This girl, who is a boy-player, has power not through controlling the game but by being able to withdraw from it at will:

For me, I have been, what could you say...? In the sexual game it was never me who established the rules but it was obligatory that it was me who defined the limits of the game. Someone puts in place the rules of the game and the others must accept those rules. The moment where one says 'pouce', I don’t know if you have this expression in English but there is an expression ‘pouce’ that one says when you want to stop the game. Children say ‘pouce’ and it stops the game. The rules that have been established are no longer valid. So those that accept the rules of the game – put in place by others – can say ‘pouce’. This is why there is power.

Masculine identification for Millet, in this sense, involves both access to pleasure – as ‘pure spending’ – and the limited power of being able to stop the game. But Millet makes the point often, that she never stops the game. Part of playing it well is to play it always; to be ever available and ever present. Millet calls to mind here Lacan’s description of the formation of a masculine identification, or what he calls ‘subjective anticipation’. For Lacan, there are three logical steps in the interpellation of men into masculinity: 1) a man knows what is not a man; 2) men recognise themselves amongst themselves to be men; and 3) a man declares himself to be a man for fear of being convinced by other men that he is not a man.7 Commenting on this formulation Slavoj Zizek explains subjective anticipation as a kind of pre-emptive strike in which a subject assumes an individuality, a symbolic identity – that of a man – in order to resolve the subjective dilemma of what it is that the Other demands. The assumption of an identity, in this sense, is an attempt to avoid the anxiety aroused by the enigma of how to be the object of the Other’s desire – or how to be what one imagines the other wants.8

I wonder if there is any scenario more threatening to female identity than that of being the orifice at an orgy? It is a site that one can only occupy in a desubjectivised state because the nature of the sexual practice erases the specificity of one’s character and yet is it also a site of radical sexual differentiation. Girls are not boys at orgies – as
many girls have discovered when playing with boys, they learn too late that they are *the one who is not* one of the boys. Positioned differently by their anatomy, they circulate as object for the pleasure and use of the boys who recognise each other as boys. It’s hardly surprising that a girl in this position would make a leap into masculine identification and thereby access the pleasure in circulation by forging an identity which erases the sexual differentiation so clearly in play. The alternative is to be that object cause of the the other’s desire which in this instance is pure availability; a receptacle of male pleasure that passes from man to man. The choices here are limited; both forms of sexual identification involve a sacrifice of sentience, subjectivity and agency. Both involve an escalation of anxiety in being the object cause of the other’s desire. The choice is to fit into a masculine hierarchy ‘alongside the boys’ or to be included within it as an excluded object. Millet’s solution to this impasse is both to be the ‘object cause of the Other’s desire’ – that circulating receptacle – and to do so from a point of view that recognises herself as a man amongst men.

In dialogue, however, Millet reveals a remainder, something that doesn’t get into this ‘solution’ and in which her being as ‘object cause of the Other’s desire’ is heavy with meaning, and a very differently articulated feminine identification. If being in an unbound state – being open to the other – characterises feminine sexuality, then Millet is its incarnation. She is open to every cock, her tongue and fingers available to every orifice no matter its filth. Suffering from a venereal disease at an orgy she simply proffers her anus for multiple penetrations; even diarrhoea doesn’t inhibit its availability for penetration. She licks the orifices of men who never wash, presents herself to a man of abject filthiness again and again, and fantasises about being taken ‘between the dustbins’. ‘I spent many nights in this hovel…The fact that he never accomplished that elementary act of comfort – brushing his teeth – I found strange. When he laughed, his upper lid raised the curtain on a yellow plaster dotted with black patches…he liked to be finger fucked up the arse.’ There is an obligatory flavour to this availability which speaks of the relentlessness of the (Freudian) drive and the way it can seize a subject and push it further and further into acts against the self. Questioned on this obligatory character of availability
Millet's answer reveals both a sexual practice dense with associations and a denial of these associations under the rubric of 'sex as an empty pocket':

Well you know, one has this expression that you learn when you're a child: 'Christian charity'. That is to say, to be charitable is to be attentive to others and to pardon their faults... And I would say that this Catholic education is an important aspect of my character. It is something that I've never renounced. I am immersed in a Catholic culture and in so far as I'm an art critic what interests me in painting and what I continue to immerse myself in is this Catholic culture. Immersed, because for we westerners images have been principally produced by the Catholic Church.

So you'd locate the genealogy of your sexual practice; its ethical underpinning in aspects of Catholicism?

There is an author who is very important for me – George Bernanos, who is a Catholic writer. In one of his novels there is a character that Bernanos is said to have based on the character of St Thérèse de Lisieux, a young saint of the nineteenth century in France, and what interested him in trying to invent a character based on this figure of the saint was the question of what a modern saint would be. That is to say, a saint for our times. And this is a book which has interested me greatly. I have been fascinated by this character ultimately in a way that goes beyond Bernanos's character. Who are the people in our modern epoch, caught up in the problems of our epoch, who are looking for this saintliness but who are unable to find it of course (except for this character), and who fail in their search for saintliness... I want to repeat what I have said earlier; that sexuality is an empty pocket; I don't think that there is a finality to the sexual act (a goal) I think it is pure spending. And from the moment you don't search to give a sense to your sexual life you are open to everything and often, your direction will come from others.

There is an oscillation here between sexual pleasure as empty of sense and sexual availability as a contemporary form of saintliness; an ethics that fuses mysticism and libertinage, as if through an act of sexual generosity Millet can cleanse the truly abject of their abjection. From
a psychoanalytic point of view, this feminine remainder – a sacrificial identification with abjection – puts in play a kind of excremental language. Millet I would suggest, is compelled to enter into excremental acts in order to sustain an ideal other; by acting as if shit is not shit she reverses the shit that stains her ego-ideal. At the same time she declares that this excremental act is in itself meaningless by sustaining that sex is an ‘empty pocket’. No doubt Millet would contest this reading, seeing in it a pathologising of pleasure and I expect she would be uncomfortable by my naming of the feminine fantasy. While masculinity and femininity flicker off and on like a strobe light in Millet’s account of her sexual life, she is only really at home in naming the masculine side of the game. At the same time, however, she does recognise that her years in psychoanalysis – which is nothing more than the intrusion of meaning into jouissance—have released her from the sexual practice she described in her book, and into ownership of the eye that sees and the I that writes.

I cannot say that psychoanalysis has changed anything in my sexual practice. For the main years of my analysis I was young enough. I entered analysis with a sexuality; I left with the same sexuality. The sole thing that was effected – and I also chose to evoke this in my book – is that I came to better understand the mechanics of it all; the motivations of myself and others. In the long term I could say that psychoanalysis, because it made me understand my motivations a little better, and the motivations of others, made me feel more and more a spectator of these sexual activities. Even if you are still in the action, from the moment when you analyse this action you have already left it. And one can say in this sense, that perhaps an effect of analysis in the long term was that the day came when I began progressively to abandon all the practices of the group. In effect, because I had the means to better understand what was happening. If you understand well, you are less interested, in fact you don’t participate in the same fashion. In this sense one can say that psychoanalysis developed my sexuality. Yes, one can say that.

Women rarely speak about group sex whether or not they have enjoyed, acquiesced or struggled against it, and yet there are always groups of men searching – through fair means or foul – for women to fuck en
The place that women occupy in these events – those barren stretches of characterless flesh – is not one that welcomes words. That is why Millet’s words matter because she puts words into a silent space and opens up that space to the possibility that we might see and think it differently – and thus re-spatialise the relations in play – even if this is an after-effect through the act of writing. What finally strikes me about Catherine Millet is that the Millet for whom sexuality is ‘pure spending’, and the Millet for whom sexual availability is a form of contemporary saintliness, are bound together – but perhaps more by the mirth that is apparent in everything Millet says – than by the logic of what she says. It is this mirth that warms me to Millet and makes me consider the path she has found through the impasses she was presented with as a young girl a success. While I joke with her that I’m glad, for once, that I’m a Protestant, I’m also impressed by her robust sense of self-possession. Whatever has happened in the past Millet is no O. requesting permission from her Master to die, nor a Justine disappearing in a flash of light. She’s palpably present and the pen is in her hand.

2 I mean here the discourse of the unconscious.
3 Millet 8
4 Millet 15
5 Millet 8
6 Millet 31–2