

Sewing, Fighting and Writing

Maria Tamboukou

Introduction

Charting Lines of Flight

The Parisian Seamstress

On November 14, 1850, a strange dialogue took place between the president of a criminal court in Paris and Jeanne Deroin, who was on trial for political conspiracy against the government:

- What is your profession?
- Teacher and journalist.
- You have also said that you are a seamstress [...]
- Please write that I have also been a seamstress.
- You are then a teacher, a journalist and a seamstress.¹

Taking the judge's final sarcastic remark as my starting point, in this book I want to explore a world of multiple 'ands' in women workers' lives, particularly focusing on the extraordinary figure of the Parisian seamstress, her passions, her actions and their effects on the social, political and cultural formations of modernity.

'More than a woman worker, a seamstress is part of a social and cultural enterprise that we have come to consider distinctively feminine', Judith Coffin has argued in her influential study on the politics of women's work in the Parisian garment trades (1996, 19). But apart from her distinct position in the history and political economy of women's work, the seamstress is a well-recognized cultural image, mostly depicted as a destitute figure to be pitied and protected: she has motivated a range of historical and sociopolitical studies that span more than two centuries²; she has been sung in popular culture³ and has inspired novels, poems, paintings⁴ and even operas.⁵ But she has mostly been the object of study—the social problem of female labour par excellence (Simon 1860), the muse or the model—very rarely the thinker, the actor or the creator—with the exception of autobiographical accounts of seamstresses who have also become writers.⁶ Such autobiographical narratives have revealed that the seamstress is inextricably entangled in the sociopolitical and cultural movements in modernity as a revolutionary, a unionized worker, a militant feminist, a thinker, a writer and a creator. It is these submerged histories that I will excavate in this book by writing

a feminist genealogy of the seamstress.

As I will further discuss in Chapter 1, the Foucauldian approach of writing genealogies as histories of the present is a critical way of problematizing the present we are part of, by excavating and deconstructing its conditions of possibility. In the case of the seamstresses, their dreary working conditions are not simply a ‘tale of the past’, but very much a contemporary issue, geographically displaced in the so-called developing countries of the global east and south, but with equally globalized consequences and questions that need urgent attention.⁷

What has therefore enabled a genealogical investigation of the figure of the seamstress is the archive of their radical practices inscribed in their personal narratives and political writings. Action as something we do always evades us, Hannah Arendt (1998) has famously argued, particularly so if we are the actors and we have to concentrate on the doing rather than the thinking or the understanding of what we do. But thanks to stories that carry traces of past actions as ‘words and deeds’, we have the chance to grasp some remnants of the fleeting present and by putting them into stories we gradually write History, with all its omissions, silences, gaps and margins. Narratives are thus *a conditio sine qua non* for the writing of history, particularly so when the grand discourse of History has ignored, downplayed, marginalized or erased histories of ‘the other’. In this light, Arendt’s take on the political nature of narratives has made connections with Foucault’s genealogical insights in rewriting the seamstress into history, creating an assemblage where narratives and discourses have been studied in their interrelation.

But although narratives and discourses have been central in this study what has also emerged as a catalytic event is the question of ‘how matter matters’ (Barad 2007) in the excavation of the conditions of possibility for the seamstress to emerge as a labour activist, a political subject, a writer of history and a creator of culture. Here, Alfred Whitehead’s (1985) critique of the separation between the material and the mental, as well as his philosophical thesis that everything is process is crucial in informing an analysis that takes as its starting point the materiality of the seamstresses’ work in understanding the multiple becomings of feminist ideas in nineteenth-century France and beyond.

MAPPING PARIS: FASHION INDUSTRIES AND THE REALITY OF UTOPIAS

It is to Paris that I put my hopes, there men and women are more advanced than in the little villages of the provinces, where life is so uniform and so monotonous. [...] I have faith in the future, I count upon Paris and I know about the influence that the capital exercises upon the provinces.⁸

In charting the material matrix of radical ideas and practices, Paris emerges as the geographical location par excellence for the seamstress to emerge in the historical stage—*le grand foyer du travail féminin* (Coffin 1996, 44). Paris, alongside Rouen, was one of the first French cities in pre-revolutionary France, where seamstresses

established independent and all female guilds in 1675. Although clandestine production was part of the labour economy in the clothing industries,⁹ being a member of the guild system was a precondition of the trade, which as Clare Crowston has persuasively shown gradually became ‘both a major actor in the urban economy and a quintessentially feminine occupation’ (2001, 2). What was also distinctive about Paris was the coexistence of a wide range of trades in response to the demands of a diverse market that included among others tailors, seamstresses and linen-drapers, as well as clothing and textile merchants. It goes without saying that there was a strict sexual division of labour within these various sections in the garment trades, charted within a matrix of hierarchies, antagonistic power relations and gendered discourses at play, famously epitomized in Jean-Jaques Rousseau’s *Emile*: ‘The needle and the sword cannot be wielded by the same hands. If I were a sovereign I would permit sewing and the needle trades only to women and to cripples reduced to occupations like theirs’ (1979, 199).

It was in this context that the seamstress emerged as a modern urban figure in the gendered histories of the labour movement and there has been a rich body of feminist scholarship around her, on which I will draw throughout the book.¹⁰ Indeed, by the end of the eighteenth century, there were around 10,000 seamstresses in Paris, a number that rose to 60,000 by the 1860s, comprising more than half of the female workforce in the French capital, while their craft had become one of the largest in France (see, Sullerot 1968, 91–92). The nineteenth century brought significant changes in the Parisian clothing industry, including the radical technological changes that culminated in the invention of the sewing machine,¹¹ as well as the entry of free market forces. The latter came into play after the abolition of the guild structures in 1791, the emergence of the ready-made clothing—what the French called *confection*—as well as the establishment of the first department stores.¹² Thus, although there was a significant rise of the workforce in the garment trades throughout the nineteenth century, this was accompanied by mass proletarianization, while the strict hierarchies and divisions of the Old Regime still remained in place: ‘Seamstresses, fashion workers, and linen-workers continued to constitute self-consciously distinct occupations and to regard each other with little sisterly solidarity’, Crowston has pithily noted (2001, 385).

Moreover, the garment industry was strange in terms of its base, which was never factories, but rather ateliers and workshops dispersed in different urban sites, usually drawing on unskilled or semi-skilled cheap labour force and therefore difficult to unionize. It goes without saying that home-based work or what the French called *le travail à domicile* was at the heart of this labour-intensive, seasonal and exploitative industry. It was, however, its seasonal character—busy in spring and autumn, while slack for several months in winter and summer—that created unbearable conditions of tiredness and exhaustion during the high season, but also opportunities for cultural and political activities during the dead season, particularly so for the skilled and therefore more highly paid workers, whose writings I will analyse and discuss throughout the book.

In this light, the two decades between 1830 and 1850, also known as the *July Monarchy*,¹³ were not only marked by fierce political uprisings and constitutional changes but were also a period of intense labour activism. During the 400 strikes that have been recorded in this period,¹⁴ workers came together to demand higher wages, nationally organized labour training and educational opportunities for the people. They also fought against the 1791 *Chapelier Law*, which forbade workers’ associations and suppressed their freedom until 1884 when it was finally abolished. It

was within such organized political and labour activism, that seamstresses, or *les femmes prolétaires* as they called themselves, took central stage and constituted themselves not only as unionized workers, but also as militant activists in the wider world of republican and later socialist politics.

The July Monarchy, as the historical time of this study, is thus a period where dramatic transformations were initiated in the garment industry, a time of important passages from craftwork to industrialized mass production, from specialized workplaces to home-based work and from highly skilled masters and mistresses to low-paid wage earners. As Joan Scott (1988) has influentially discussed, gender differences were crucial in how seamstresses and tailors reacted and responded to such transformations. More widely the history of the trade has been much more discontinuous, messy and contradictory than the Marxism-influenced analyses of the industrial formations in modernity have been willing to admit. In this context, Coffin has argued that the unruly histories of the garment industry open up ways to problematize linear approaches in the process of industrialization and ‘to reflect on the manifold role of gender in that process’ (1996, 7).

What has also been downplayed in the complex historical processes of the early industrialization are the multiple links between the seamstresses’ activities within the workers’ associations and their passionate entanglement in the revolutionary events of the 1830s and of 1848. There is of course an important body of literature on nineteenth-century French feminism,¹⁵ but although the majority of its protagonists were indeed seamstresses, their identity as workers has been stifled by their political identity as socialist utopian feminists, be they Saint-Simonians, Fourierists or Owenites. It is the seamstresses’ involvement in these movements that I will discuss next, particularly taking issue with a tendency in the literature to identify the nineteenth-century feminist movement in France as ‘Saint-Simonian feminism’ and its protagonists as ‘Saint-Simonian women’.¹⁶

Romantic Socialisms

The Saint-Simonian movement and its influences on the political and social movements of modernity have been the object of numerous studies both in French and English historiographies.¹⁷ As I will further discuss in Chapters 1, 3 and 4, what has been highlighted in these studies is the movement’s egalitarian position vis-à-vis women, its focus on social issues and questions, including the unique notion of ‘social love’, as well as its pragmatism in relation to a new organization of work beyond class and gender divisions of labour. The movement’s overall ideas were systematically gathered in *The Exposition of the Doctrine of Saint Simon*¹⁸, which included among other principles, peaceful relations between social classes, recognition of the value of work, as well as the abolishment of the inheritance of wealth.

Their egalitarian and peaceful principles notwithstanding, the Saint-Simonians supported private ownership of property but regarded it as a public trust rather than an individual right; they suggested that the means of production should be at the disposal of workers, opposed laissez-faire market modes and asked for central planning and state control over the economy. The social aspects of the Saint-Simonian ideas and visions unsurprisingly became particularly popular among women workers in general and seamstresses in particular, in their double struggle against economic and sexual exploitation. As Scott has noted,

Dressmakers and seamstresses were amongst those who responded to the Saint-Simonian gospel, outnumbering other categories of the movement's working class disciples and contributing importantly to the *Tribune des Femmes*, a newspaper edited in 1832–1834 entirely by Saint-Simonian women. (1988, 95)

But although the first feminist newspaper, which went through a series of name changes, firstly emerged in the Saint-Simonian publishing circles, it was not 'entirely edited by Saint-Simonian women'.¹⁹ As I will further discuss in Chapter 3, the newspaper's founder Désirée Véret explicitly detached herself from Saint-Simonianism in an article published in the seventh issue of the newspaper on November 4, 1832.²⁰ Jeanne Deroin, one of its first contributors, had also criticized the religious character and organization of Saint-Simonianism from the very beginning and withdrew from the newspaper and the movement after its fourth issue in September 1832. Her 'Profession of Faith'²¹ has become one of the most cited texts in the nineteenth-century feminist literature. In this light, she can nowhere be registered as 'Saint-Simonian'; instead she has been theorized and discussed as an early socialist feminist.²² Marie-Reine Guindorf, the first editor of the newspaper, who remained on the editorial team throughout its first year, had also turned to Fourierism by the end of 1833 and all her articles are distinctively different from those written by Saint-Simonian contributors. Even Suzanne Voilquin, the Saint-Simonian disciple par excellence, who joined the editorial team after Véret's withdrawal and remained as one of its editors till the end, distanced herself from Saint-Simonian restrictions when she decided to write openly about the conditions of her divorce.²³ A careful reading of this feminist newspaper—the first to be written and edited by women only—thus reveals the diverse ideas of the early socialist feminist movements: although they were significantly influenced by Saint-Simonianism, they cannot be kept within its ideological and organizational boundaries.

As I have already noted above, many of the politically active seamstresses, including Désirée Véret, Marie-Reine Guindorf and Jeanne Deroin were also involved in the Fourierist circles, an equally important social and political movement in nineteenth-century France, which has also attracted a rich body of literature.²⁴ Although Saint-Simonians and Fourierists shared many egalitarian ideas, there were also some important differences between the two movements. Women in the Saint-Simonian dogma were in need of spiritual guidance in order to attain equality and live in harmony. There was no such need in Fourier's ideas: men and women were born equal and they had the same rights and needs. In this context, sexual freedom for Saint-Simonians was a prerequisite of women's liberation, since women were sexually enslaved; for Fourier, however, sexual freedom was a requirement for both men and women, since their liberation depended on the possibility of expressing emotions and passions. The two movements also had different ideas about the new social order: Saint-Simonians believed that human progress would advance through industrial production and capital accumulation. Despite the many differences among them, Fourier and his followers rejected urban and industrial relations and put forward the project of phalansteries, self-sustained co-operative communities.²⁵ Finally, although association was a crucial notion for both movements, association bonds were hierarchically and religiously configured for Saint-Simonians, while they were purely economical for Fourierists. Most importantly, Fourier's ideas were tremendously influential for feminist thought as developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

As a general thesis: *Social progress and changes from one era to the next are brought about in proportion to the progress of women toward freedom, and social decline is brought about in proportion to the decrease in women's freedom.* Other events influence political change; but there is no other cause that produces so rapid a social improvement or so rapid a social decline as the change in women's lot. (Fourier 1808, cited in Moses 1984, 92, emphasis in the text)

Throughout the book, I will return to the ideas and concepts of the romantic socialist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and particularly the way we have accepted their 'utopian' character—a label that Marx and Engels (2002) attached to these movements—but which, as Barbara Taylor (1983, 19) has persuasively argued, they have persistently rejected. As I will further discuss in Chapter 3, feminist historian Michèle Riot-Sarcey (1998) has rigorously defended 'the reality' of the nineteenth-century socialist 'utopias', having made an important intervention in the thorny issue of the relations between the social and the political.

The book contributes to this field of theoretical debates by drawing on neo-materialist approaches and particularly Whitehead's (1985) process philosophy. In doing this, the analysis goes beyond the dualistic separation of the material and the spiritual as a way of understanding early socialist feminism. Moreover, it does this not through some abstract theorization, but through a nuanced discussion of women workers' political and personal narratives—an alternative route of political analysis that counterpoises the abstraction of philosophical discourse according to Arendt (1998). But how are these documents to be understood?

LIVES, DOCUMENTS AND NARRATIVE PERSONAE

There is a rich body of literature around early socialist feminism, already highlighted above, but what I argue has been problematic in this scholarship is the way the seamstresses' personal, political and creative narratives have been read, presented and used. As I will further discuss in Chapter 2, the seamstresses' narratives have not been properly analysed as 'documents of life' (Plummer 2001). They mostly appear in a fragmented way, as 'data', as rhetorically powerful quotations, as evidence of the researcher's/writer's argument as well as discourses to be deconstructed. In this context, the reader rarely has an overview of their life as documents, their order of discourse, or their position within the wider archive that they are part of.²⁶ But as Liz Stanley has pithily noted, 'The idea of "documents of life" is part of the spectrum of narrative and biographical inquiry and it involves an approach or methodology, not just a particular kind of data' (2013, 5). A serious attention to 'how a document is' thus initiates conceptual, methodological and ethical moves that Stanley argues have a decisive impact on the research process, its 'findings' and its 'outputs'.

It is such important gaps in the literature that the book addresses: its aim is to write a feminist genealogy of the Parisian seamstress, exploring her agentic intervention in the sociocultural and political formations of modernity. As a Foucauldian genealogy, the analysis excavates marginalized and submerged documents in the archive and focuses on entanglements of material and

discursive practices as inscribed on autobiographical and political writings. There are four areas of radical practices that are particularly highlighted and discussed in their interrelation: work, love, agonistic politics and creativity through writing. These themes have become the topics of the six chapters of this book as outlined below.

Chapter 1 delineates the theoretical framework of the book, bringing together insights from Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt and Alfred Whitehead. Chapter 2 maps the archive of the research and makes connections between archival research and narrative analysis as a process of knowledge and understanding. The seamstresses' political writings are discussed and analysed in Chapter 3, which particularly focuses on a range of newspapers and pamphlets that they published between 1830 and 1843. Chapter 4 explores questions around love, sexuality, emotions, affects and passions drawing on a range of personal writings and particularly letters. Chapter 5 looks at the seamstresses' involvement in the Parisian uprisings, strikes and insurrections and most importantly in the revolutionary events of 1848. Chapter 6 presents and discusses the seamstresses' creative writings, exploring links between autobiography and fiction. Finally, the conclusion reassembles women workers' radical practices and discusses them in the light of process philosophy.

All chapters draw on different genres of political writings and autobiographical documents including journal articles, political brochures, memoirs, letters and autobiographical fiction. Many of these documents have never been published or translated into English before; I address some of the problems, challenges and pleasures of translation in Chapter 2. In bringing all these diverse documents together I have created a plane of consistency, the 'narrative assemblage' of my genealogy (Tamboukou 2010a). But my analysis is not restricted in discourses and documents; it is also attentive to the authors of these documents, the *narrative personae* of my research: these are conceptual figures that I have come up with over the years that I have been analysing discourses, narratives and authors in their interrelation (see Tamboukou 2010a, 2014a).

In configuring the seamstresses as *narrative personae*, I have followed Deleuze and Guattari's (1994) notion of the 'conceptual personae'—quite simply figures that the philosophers create to stage critical dialogues—but I have also made connections with Arendt's (1990) take of the persona as a theatrical mask, as well as a legal figure. In this context, the *narrative personae* are conceptual figures, whose actions leave behind them storylines to be followed in the pursuit of meaning and understanding. But the fact that we retrace their narratives does not necessarily mean that we find the answer to the burning question of who these seamstresses 'really' were. This is not to deny that they were real persons, but to denote the limitations of stories to convey the essence of who their author is. It is important to note that the lack of essence does not necessarily lead to 'the death of the subject', be it Barthian or Foucauldian. In his late work, Foucault conceptualized the self as a form and looked at the genealogy of its technologies (1988b). Instead of a unified and autonomous subject, there are instead technologies of the self, nomadic passages and subject positions that the *narrative personae* of my inquiries take up and move between, while writing personal and political stories.²⁷ Moreover, it is through their stories that certain concepts, ideas and events can be expressed, rehearsed and dramatized so that their enactment can create a scene for dialogic exchanges, communication, understanding and action.

Further considered within the realm of rights, the *narrative personae* of my research

take up a position in discourse and become figures with whom one can be in dialogue, but also to whom one is responsible: as a feminist narrative researcher I am accountable to them, having taken up the responsibility of presenting their stories as a meaningful form of the self. The latter is open to interpretation and negotiation between you as audience/readers, myself as an author and narrative researcher and my *narrative personae*: although dead many years ago, they are still alive, active and very much among us as their ‘words and deeds’ still shape feminist histories in the making and therefore the archives of the future. What I therefore want to do now is to briefly sketch the pen-portraits of the three *narrative personae*, Désirée Véret-Gay, Marie-Reine Guindorf and Jeanne Deroin, whose writings will be analysed throughout the book. Other *narrative personae* will also be considered, most notably Suzanne Voilquin (1801–1877), whose memoirs will be discussed in Chapter 6 and thus she is not included in the pen-portraits below.

Désirée Véret-Gay (1810–c.1891)

‘I was born on April 4, 1810’,²⁸ Désirée Véret-Gay wrote to the old friend and lover of her youth Victor Considerant,²⁹ on June 21, 1890, from Place St Gudule in Brussels. Her twelve letters to Considerant, sent between 1890 and 1891 are ‘among the most beautiful and moving documents in the whole Considerant archive’, historian Jonathan Beecher (2001, 441) has noted in his extended studies of the Fourierist social movement, wherein Considerant was a leading figure.³⁰ It is from her extant letters that we have also learnt that Véret-Gay outlived her husband and her two sons: ‘I have a free spirit and I am independent due to the little fortune that my beloved sons and my husband have left me’,³¹ she wrote to Considerant in the same letter above. Looking back at her life, while living in solitude and almost blind, Véret-Gay remembered the revolutionary activities of her youth and her admiration for the apostles of the Saint-Simonian ideas:

I was searching the light and a thick veil was hiding it from my eyes. However, I never despaired, I had faith [...] in a different world [and] here I am in this new world, the veil has fallen [...] my eyes have opened, I have seen a beautiful picture in the future.³²

Disillusioned by the way the Saint-Simonian hierarchy marginalized women, despite the egalitarian principles of their doctrine, Véret detached herself from the movement as early as in 1832: ‘There is different work to be done. For me all social questions depend on women’s freedom’,³³ she wrote in *La Femme Nouvelle*, the first feminist newspaper that she had founded with Marie-Reine Guindorf only months before, in August 1832. It was around this time that Véret turned to Fourierism, and in spring 1833 she decided to move to London where she worked as a seamstress for almost two years. Her letters to Charles Fourier reveal that she did not enjoy her life in England: ‘My nature has been broken and twisted by civilization. There is in me a chaos I cannot clarify; the longer I live, the more incomprehensible I find myself’,³⁴ she wrote from 37 Duke St, Manchester Square in London.

But despite her difficulties in England, Véret got involved in the Owenite circles and worked closely with Anna Wheeler, ‘who was like a second mother to me’.³⁵ On returning to France in 1834, Véret worked in Dieppe first in the women’s clothing industry and then in Paris again, while remaining active in the Fourierist and Owenite circles. It was during this time that she had a brief affair with Considerant:

I guessed from the beginning your defects and your qualities and in spite of myself I loved everything about you. Nothing has escaped my memory: from your arrival at Paris in 1832 and your visit with Fugère up until the last time I saw you in 1837 at Robert Owen's rooms in the Hôtel de l'Angleterre.³⁶

In 1837, Véret married Jules Gay, who was Owen's translator and close follower, and had two sons, Jean in 1838 and Owen in 1842. Together they tried to found an infant's school at Châtillon-sous-Bagneux in 1840; the school was to be based on Owen's pedagogical model of educating children in freedom,³⁷ but the project did not succeed in the end, perhaps it was too much ahead of its time.

Désirée Gay, as she signed herself after her marriage, immersed herself in labour activism, and later in the fierce politics of the 1848 revolution. Together with Jeanne Deroin she contributed to Eugénie Niboyet's daily newspaper *La Voix des Femmes* between March and June 1848. She then became editor of the *Politique des Femmes*, which only published two issues and was closed down in the aftermath of the June 1848 uprising.

After a second attempt to run the school at Châtillon-sous-Bagneux in 1848, Gay resumed her work as a dressmaker and opened an atelier in the Parisian fashion street par excellence, *rue de la Paix*—a successful enterprise as her 'honourable mention' in the 1855 Paris international exhibition testifies.³⁸ However, in 1864 Gay had to emigrate once more as her husband's editorial activities were too much ahead of their time: they faced a series of censorship attacks and they finally chose exile to avoid imprisonment. After a short time wandering in Europe, including Belgium, Switzerland and Italy, they eventually settled down in Brussels. During this period, she got involved in the international labour movement and served as the temporary president of the women's section in the central committee of the First Workers' International, held in Geneva in 1866,³⁹ while in 1868 she published the book *Éducation rationnelle de la première enfance: manuel à l'usage des jeunes mères* in Geneva and London (Gay 1868). Her ideas and impressions about labour politics in general and Belgium in particular are vividly expressed in her letter to Considerant below:

The movement seen up close here as a whole, in this little Belgian country, is a curious thing to study insofar as it is a mixture of enthusiasm, sentiment and above all, the positivity that typifies the Belgian character. [...] Once upon a time I used to say jokingly that Belgium was a mere baby. Now it is entering its virile passionate stage.⁴⁰

Véret-Gay must have died sometime after July 1891, the date of her last extant letter, but we will never know for sure. Although the seamstress, who signed as Jeanne-Désirée, Désirée Véret, Désirée Gay and also Désirée Véret, veuve Gay, lived a fully active political life, she did not reveal much about her inner thoughts and passions, with the exception of a few letters that I will discuss in Chapter 4. Her political writings in the form of petitions, journal articles and letters have become a significant body in the archive of feminist history that cannot be restricted within the boundaries of Saint-Simonianism, Fourierism, Owenism, utopian socialism or any other labels that have been attached to the European social movements of the nineteenth century. As I will further argue throughout the book, it was her entanglement in the material conditions of her work as a seamstress that created conditions of possibility for her political ideas and practices to emerge and unfold, making connections with, but not reduced to the ideas and discourses of nineteenth-century romantic socialism.

Marie-Reine Guindorf (1812–1837)

Since we have started our Apostolate, weak, isolated and without any other resources than those of our needle, we have experienced many difficulties. The greatest was to make ourselves known, to make the world learn who we are and finally to appeal to women to help us reach our goal.⁴¹

In addressing the readers of the newspaper that she co-founded with Véret in 1832, Marie-Reine Guindorf highlighted the fact that she was writing from the subject position of a needle worker: indeed, throughout her involvement in the newspaper it was the proletarian women's rights that she wrote about with passion and commitment. Like Véret, however, Guindorf was soon disillusioned by the Saint-Simonian decision to exclude women from its hierarchy, but unlike her friend and comrade she remained as co-editor of the newspaper for the whole first year of its publication alongside Voilquin, who had joined the editorial team after Véret's withdrawal. It is from Guindorf's articles in the newspaper, as well as Voilquin's published memoirs, *Souvenirs d'une fille du peuple*, first published in 1866, that we can have some glimpses in Guindorf's life and work.

As already boldly stated in her editorial above, Guindorf worked as a seamstress, which was how she got involved in the Saint-Simonian circles. After the July revolution of 1830, many workers, women among them, felt disillusioned by how the French bourgeoisie took advantage of their battles in the barricades. They thus turned to the Saint-Simonians, who were talking about real social issues and most importantly the problem of work that was downplayed and ignored in the abstractions of republican politics and discourses:

Oh, I understand, for you writers, the misery of the people is not but a theory, and you believe that political rights will improve their condition; but don't make a mistake, it is not this that the people demand, Lyon⁴² can teach you better. Once the people there revolted, [...] have they asked for political rights? No they have demanded bread and work! Yes, bread and work, this is the motto of the people! They feel their sufferings and know well that these rights which you scribble every day in your papers will not give to their children a better education or to them work rewarded enough to make them exit from the misery they find themselves in.⁴³

In responding to the letter of a worker in the journal *Bon Sens*, urging its editors to abandon sterile political discussions and consider ways of material improvement for workers' lives, Guindorf bitterly criticized the intellectuals' ignorance of the situation of the working classes: 'What would you say of a man who seeing one of his peers dying from lack of essential needs was given a nice lecture on the freedom of the press, instead of being given necessary support? No doubt you would find it ridiculous',⁴⁴ she wrote. The need to be practical and help workers improve the material conditions of their lives was thus at the heart of Guindorf's ideas and actions and what had initially attracted her to their circles. Indeed after the July days Saint-Simonians had organized outreach programmes in the working-class Parisian arrondissements, which as Moses has noted included weekly lectures, 'a special teaching programme and two cooperative workshops, one for tailors and one for seamstresses' (1984, 45). Guindorf was very active in the debates around public education between 1833 and 1834, the years that the

Loi Guizot that established state primary schools was implemented.⁴⁵ As she wrote in February 1833:

Public education is a question that at the moment preoccupies all advanced people, reasonably so, because the future of society depends on its solution. It is education that will transform gross and ignorant people to human beings who are calm, know their duties and their rights and accomplish the first so as to have the right to demand the latter. In this important question I think that it is useful that women should make their voice heard.⁴⁶

Guindorf participated actively in a series of conferences that *The Society for Educational Methods* organized in Paris between 1833 and 1834 on the problem of 'improving the great intellectual movement which is manifested among women' and wrote critically in the *Tribune des femmes* about it: 'Here we have arrived at the sixth conference on the same question, and is the solution more advanced than in the first day? I don't think so. On the contrary, the question has turned: instead of searching ways to use women's intelligence, we now search for ways to develop it. This constitutes the fact that the question was badly posed',⁴⁷ she wrote in January 1834. By that time, she had left the editorial team of the *Tribune des Femmes* to throw herself as a volunteer to women workers' education. In writing a tribute to Guindorf in the last issue of the first feminist newspaper, Voilquin noted:

Marie-Reine, my co-editor for a long time stopped only to satisfy her life sympathy for the people, in 1833 she was accepted as a member of the Association for Peoples' Education; since then her days have been devoted to work and her evenings have been employed for the education of women and the daughters of the people.⁴⁸

It is in Voilquin's *Souvenirs* that the tragic details of Guindorf's suicide in July 1837 can be traced.⁴⁹ By that time, Guindorf had been married to Fliche, a young Saint-Simonian, who had also become a Fourierist like her; they had a son born in 1835 and were making plans for a phalanstery. In Voilquin's view, who had lived with the couple for six weeks in January 1837, Guindorf had everything that a young woman might have desired: a husband who loved her, an adorable baby boy and a nice Parisian apartment given to the couple by an unexpected inheritance of her parents. And yet her body was retrieved from Le Pont de Grenelle of the river Seine on July 1, 1837, after she had gone missing for some days. Voilquin's speculation is that Guindorf had fallen in love with a Fourierist intellectual and proponent of free love and that she eventually chose death as a solution to the emotional impasse she had found herself in, but we will never know. Her suicide was not the only one among the feminist women of the early socialist movements, a theme that I will further discuss in Chapter 4.

Jeanne Deroin (1805–1894)

'I was never familiar with the joys of infancy or the games of early childhood. From the time I learned to read, reading became my sole occupation and the charm of my every moment. I felt a vague desire to experience and know everything',⁵⁰ Jeanne Deroin wrote in her *Profession of Faith* a rich and powerful text sent to the Saint-Simonian newspaper, the *Globe*, where she boldly lays out her beliefs, her thoughts, her hopes and her fears. It is from this document that we can trace some autobiographical

inscriptions since Deroin never wrote a memoir.⁵¹ It is also from archival documents of the City of Paris that Michèle Serrière (1981) has found that Deroin was born on December 5, 1805. Although nothing is known about her parents, it is again from a letter that Deroin wrote towards the end of her life to Hubertine Auclert, a young feminist delegate of the Workers' Congress in Marseilles in 1879, that we know that she grew up in poverty: 'Born in the beginning of imperial despotism, I was profoundly moved by the mists and anxieties of mothers and the massacres of the war victims. Poor me, I saw from a very close distance the sufferings of the disinherited'.⁵² Growing up as a working-class woman, Deroin had to put aside her dream for education and she became a seamstress as she had to earn her bread:

Still too young to appreciate my social position, I was happy. The future seemed bright and gracious. I saw myself rich with the treasures of knowledge, unique object of my wishes, but these gratifying dreams would soon fade away. The necessity of work, made me understand that deprived of wealth, I had to renounce knowledge, happiness, I resigned to myself.⁵³

But Deroin did not really resign. Like many of her contemporaries, she got involved in the Saint-Simonian circles and although deeply critical of their religious character she tried to see the advantages of the movement:

I ignored the existence of Saint-Simonism, but the reading of some passages of the *Globe*, have excited my attention. My preventions against all religious institutions have not disposed me favourably in welcoming a new religion. [...] The explications that were given to me by a member of the society, Monsieur Deroches and the conscious examination of the principles of the Doctrine dispelled my suspicions. I have got the conviction that the real goal of Saint-Simonism is the happiness of humanity, and this persuasion was sufficient to inspire in me a most lively sympathy.⁵⁴

It was indeed through her friend Antoine Ulysse Desroches, who eventually became her husband, that Deroin got to have 'some sympathy' for the Saint-Simonians, but sympathy it remained. Although she worked with many Saint-Simonian women in different forums, she remained distanced from and critical of the movement and particularly of its religious and mystic ideas and dogmas. Deroin was among the first women who wrote in *La Femme Libre*: her *Appeal to Women*, was published in the first issue of the newspaper in August 1832, was translated into English by Anna Wheeler and was reprinted in the Owenite newspaper *The Crisis* in June 1833:

When the whole of the people are roused in the name of Liberty, and the labouring class demand their freedom, shall we women remain passive and inert spectators of this great movement of social emancipation, which takes place under our eyes?⁵⁵

Influential as her first article was on both sides of the channel, Deroin only wrote one more article, published in the fourth issue of the newspaper⁵⁶ and then she withdrew. As she explained in the letter she wrote to Auclert, she was indignant at the way some women in the Saint-Simonian circles understood the idea of free love.⁵⁷

Little is known about Deroin's life between 1832 and 1848 apart from the fact that she gave birth to three children—two daughters and a son—and that caring

for her family occupied a great deal of her time. But it was also during these years that after some failed attempts, she eventually became a qualified teacher and opened a school for children, which she ran until the 1848 revolution.

Having distanced herself from the Saint-Simonian gospel, Deroin was influenced by Fourier's ideas, but also by other socialist theorists of the period, including Pierre Leroux and Etienne Cabet.⁵⁸ Moreover, Flora Tristan's idea of *The Workers' Union* (1843) inspired Deroin's attempts to form a workers' association, a project that eventually led to her arrest and imprisonment in 1850. Deroin was indeed immersed in the events of the 1848 revolution from a range of politically agonistic positions: as a 'femme libre', a journalist and a *clubiste*,⁵⁹ a workers' delegate, as well as a candidate in the 1849 legislative election—the first woman to stand in a national election. To do this she closed the school, left her children to the care of their father and took back the name of her revolutionary youth. This is how she wrote about her political activity to Léon Richer,⁶⁰ founder of the French League for Women's Rights:

When in 1848, I wrote and spoke in public, I did not do it because I thought I was talented, but because I was excited by a powerful impulsion, which surmounted my natural timidity through the conviction that I had to accomplish the mission that had inspired me since my youth. When M. Eugène Pelletan told me one day that I was acting as if I were firing a gun in the middle of the street to attract attention, he was right, but it was not to attract attention to myself but to the cause that I was devoted to. This is why I stood in the National Assembly, having previously asked Mme George Sand and Pauline Roland to do it; they refused and that is why I did it: I was convinced that I had to knock on all closed doors.⁶¹

Already from prison as well as after her release, Deroin continued her revolutionary activities mostly through writing. The first volume of her *Almanach des Femmes* was published in Paris in the beginning of 1852, but in August she took refuge in London in fear of more persecution and imprisonment. Her children joined her in 1853, but not her invalid husband who died from exhaustion and the anxieties of his family adventures. It was in London that she got involved in the socialist circles of the time: she published the second volume of the *Almanach* as a French/English bilingual edition in 1853, while its third volume in 1854 was Deroin's last extant publication. It was also in her struggle to survive that she took up the needle again and worked as an embroiderer, as well as a private tutor in French. Life was difficult for Deroin in the first decade of her exile. In 1861, she opened a school for the children of foreigners and exiles, but as she wrote to Richer, the school was a financial failure:

These two years were a period of great distress for me and my children, because of the lack of fees payment from most of my pupils, whose parents were very poor. [...] I can't enter into more detail about the difficulty of our situation, aggravated by the illness of my son.⁶²

Deroin outlived her son and her younger daughter and went through her old age with the support of a pension of six hundred francs that she eventually got from the French government in 1880. Her last extant thoughts for a different future are inscribed in the letter she wrote to Auclert in early January 1886:

Thanks for your nice letter and your good wishes to me for a long life, which I desire and I hope to be realized, not because I believe in a complete triumph of our aspirations in my present life but because I wish I could work a bit more, before passing to my following life, with all the ardour of my religious and social

convictions and with more experience and intellectual power to manifest them.⁶³

It is from the same letter that we know that she had been working on her autobiography, which she never finished: 'I have not gathered yet all the necessary notes for my biography, which I am preoccupied with in the hope of being useful and which will probably appear, after I have entered a different existence',⁶⁴ she wrote, but a full biography of hers has yet to be written. Deroin died forgotten by her contemporaries and has remained a riddle even in contemporary feminist debates. Throughout the book I will draw on a number of biographical sketches and references that have been written about her life and work,⁶⁵ particularly taking issue with Scott's (1996) argument that Deroin had 'only paradoxes to offer' in the debates around political rights.

NOTES

1. Minutes of the trial, cited in Serrière 1981, 20.
2. For an overview of the seamstresses' representation in socioeconomic and historical studies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Coffin 1996. See also, Walkley 1981; Rowbotham 1993; Green 1997; Crowston 2001.
3. I refer here to Thomas Hood 'Song of the Shirt', which was published in the popular magazine *Punch* in 1843 and had a lasting effect on sensitizing the public about the dreadful working and living conditions of the Victorian seamstress.
4. See Amireh 2000; Alexander 2003; Harris 2005 for a rich overview of cultural representations of the seamstress.
5. I refer here to the French opera *Louise* written in 1896 by Gustave Charpentier.
6. See among others: Voilquin 1866, 1869; Keckley 2006 [1868]; Bouvier 1983 [1936]; Pesotta 1987 [1944] and 1958.
7. The Rana Plaza disaster in April 2013, when 1,129 garment workers lost their lives after the collapse of an eight-storied garment factory building in the wider area of Dhaka in Bangladesh is a painful reminder of the need for histories of the present to inform current actions and policies in the garment industry and beyond.
8. Letter from Augustine, a young proletarian woman to the *Tribune des Femmes- La Femme Nouvelle* 1(17), 228, April/May 1833.
9. See Coffin 1996, particularly Chapter 1.
10. See among others: Scott 1988; Coffin 1996; DeGroat 1997; Green 1997; Rogers 1997; Crowston 2001.
11. There were a range of sewing machine technological developments in the late eighteenth century, but the first sewing machine that came was patented in 1829 by the French artisan Barthélemy Thimonnier; it was fiercely opposed by tailors, becoming obsolete by 1845, but it was triumphantly revived by Singer in the 1860s and 1870s. See Coffin, 1996, particularly Chapters 2 and 3.
12. *Bon Marché* was the first Parisian department store to open in 1852, but the first generation of these stores was the *magasins de nouveautés*, of the 1820s and 1830s. For a history of Parisian department stores, see among others: Miller 1981.
13. Also known as the 'bourgeois monarchy', this is the period of the reign of Louis-Philippe (1830–1848) who was brought to the throne after the 1830 July revolution that led to the abdication of Charles X and the fall of the Bourbon monarchy. For historical studies about the July Monarchy 1830–1848, see among others: Pinkney 1973; Pilbeam 1983; Popkin 2010.
14. Roger Magraw has noted that 89 strikes broke out only in the period between 1830 and 1833 (1992, 53).
15. See among others: Bell and Offen 1983; Moses 1984; Cross and Gray 1992; Moses

and Rabine 1993; Scott 1996; Gordon and Cross 1996; Draper 2011.

16. See Moses and Rabine 1993, particularly Chapter 2.

17. For an overview of the literature on the Saint-Simonian movement and ideas, see Pilbeam 2014.

18. Their *Exposition* included their religious principles as well that have been widely discussed in the Saint-Simonian literature, but go beyond the remits of this chapter.

19. I will further discuss these name changes and the overall history of the journal in Chapter 3.

20. *Apostolat des Femmes-La Femme Nouvelle* 1(7), 69, November 4, 1832. See also, Riot-Sarcey 1992, 1994.

21. BnF, Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, Fonds Enfantin ou Fonds Saint-Simonien/ Ms7608/112 lettres/Correspondence du Globe (Dames), (BnF/BdA/FE/MS7608/CdG/Deroin). Also transcribed and published by Riot-Sarcey (1992, 116–39).

22. See Ranvier 1897, 1908, 1909; Serrière 1981; Riot-Sarcey 1992 and 1994; Scott 1996; Draper 2011; Rancière 2012.

23. See the very last issue of the second volume of the *Tribune des Femmes-La Femme Nouvelle*, April 1834.

24. For an overview of this literature and of the Fourierist ideas, see Beecher 1986, 2001.

25. For the organization of these communities, see 'The Phalanstery' in Beecher and Bienvenu, 1971.

26. It has to be noted here that Bell and Offen (1983) and Moses and Rabine (1993) have translated and presented lengthy extracts of some important feminist writings of the July Monarchy. Apart from some very short introductions, however, these documents have not been further analysed.

27. See Tamboukou (2003a) for a discussion of technologies of the female self.

28. Désirée Véret, veuve Gay to Victor Considerant, letter dated, June 21, 1890. Archives Nationales 10AS 42(8), 59, 2, (AnF/10AS42/8/DVG/59/2).

29. Victor Considerant (1808–1893) was a follower of Charles Fourier's ideas and a significant historical figure in the movement of French Romantic Socialism. See Beecher 2001 for a rich intellectual biography.

30. See Beecher 1986, 2000, 2001.

31. Véret-Gay to Considerant, letter dated, June 21 1890, (AnF/10AS42/8/ DVG/59/2).

32. Véret to Enfantin, letter dated September 11, 1831, 1. Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, Fonds Enfantin, Ms7608/Correspondance du Globe (Dames)/Désirée (J.)/4 lettres/40(1) [in microform] (BnF/BdA/FE/Ms7608/CdG(D)/DJ/40,1). Also in Michèle Riot-Sarcey 1992, 69–70.

33. 'From my work you will know my name', *Apostolat des Femmes-La Femme Nouvelle*, 1(7), 69–70, November 4, 1832.

34. Véret to Charles Fourier, letter dated August 14, 1833, transcribed and published by Riot-Sarcey 1995, 6.

35. Véret-Gay to Considerant, letter dated, September 7, 1890, (AnF/10AS42/8/ DVG/62/2).

36. Véret-Gay to Considerant, letter dated, October 2, 1890, (AnF/10AS42/8/ DVG/64/2).

37. For Owen's educational ideas, see among others: Donnachie 2000.

38. See, letterhead of Gay's letter to Enfantin, dated May 28, 1856: '*Exposition Universelle 1855, Mention Honorable, Mme Gay, Modes, Rue de La Paix 19*', (BNF/BA/FE/CD/7728/163). See also Riot-Sarcey (1994, 281, 343).

39. Véret-Gay to Considerant, letter dated, September 17, 1890, (AnF/10AS42/8/ DVG/63/2).

40. Désirée Véret, veuve Gay to Victor Considerant, letter dated, October 3, 1890, (AnF/10AS42/8/DVG/64/3).

41. Marie-Reine Guindorf, 'To our readers' in *La Femme Libre-Apostolat des Femmes*, 1(6), 41–43, October 1832.

42. Here, Guindorf refers to the first silk workers' uprising in Lyon, further discussed in Chapter 3.
43. Guindorf, 'Response' in the *Apostolat des Femmes-La Femme Nouvelle*, 1(6), 48–50, October 1832.
44. Ibid.
45. The *Loi Guizot* of 1833 reduced illiteracy through the establishment of state primary education, but it had many problems: primary education was not made compulsory and was only free for children of very poor families. Although every commune of more than 600 inhabitants was obliged to operate a boys' school as well as a training college for teachers, there was no provision for girls, whose education was dependent on whether there was space, a ridiculous condition that Guindorf wrote vehemently against. Yet, girls had to wait until the *Loi Duruy* of 1867 to have the same educational opportunities. For an overview of girls' education in France, see Anderson 1975.
46. Guindorf, 'Response' in the *Apostolat des Femmes-La Femme Nouvelle*, 1(12), 144–47, February, 1832.
47. Guindorf, 'Society for Educational Methods' in the *Tribune des Femmes-La Femme Nouvelle*, 2(6), 93–96, January 1834.
48. Suzanne Voilquin, *Tribune des Femmes-La Femme Nouvelle* 2(11), 182.
49. See Voilquin 1866, Chapitre XXXIX 'Suicide de Marie-Reine', 479–82.
50. Deroin, 'Profession of Faith', (BnF/BdA/FE/MS7608/CdG/Deroin/22). Also, in Riot-Sarcey 1992, 128.
51. According to Adrien Ranvier (1897, 198), Deroin was in the process of writing her *Souvenirs de 1848* in 1880, but this work was never completed and there were only fragments of her political writings among the papers that she gave to Ranvier, but which have now unfortunately disappeared. Some of these writings have been included in Ranvier's biographical sketches (1897, 1908, 1909), and most notably her *Testament*, which has been published in its entirety (Deroin 1909).
52. Jeanne Deroin, veuve Desroches to Hubertine Auclert, letter dated, January 10, 1886. Bibliothèque Historique De la Ville de Paris, Archives Marie-Louise Bouglé, Autographs, Jeanne Deroin, Carton 4247, 9 lettres, (BHVP/AMB/Au/CP4247/JD). Also transcribed in la Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Recueil: Deroin, Jeanne. Dossier documentaire. (BMD/R/DJ/DD)
53. BnF/BdA/FE/MS7608/CdG/Deroin/23. Also, in Riot-Sarcey 1992, 128–29. 54. Ibid., 30–31 and 132–33.
55. Jeanne-Victoire [Deroin], *La Femme Libre-Apostolat des Femmes* 1 (1) 1–3, August 15, 1832. For different translations of this article, see Bell and Offen 1983, 146–47 and Moses and Rabine 1993, 282–84. I discuss the challenges of various translations in Chapter 2.
56. Jeanne-Victoire [Deroin]'Alliance of Science and Industry' in *Apostolat des Femmes-La Femme Nouvelle* 1(4), 1–2, September 19, 1832.
57. Deroin to Auclert, letter dated, January 10, 1886, (BHVP/AMLB/Au/CP4247/JD).
58. Pierre Leroux's *De La Ploutocratie*, published in 1848, had criticized the accumulation of the means of production in the hands of the few, while Etienne Cabet's *Voyage to Icaria*, first published in 1840, was propagating an egalitarian and harmonious communist society.
59. 'Clubistes' were the members of the many revolutionary clubs that erupted in Paris during the 1848 revolution. For a historical overview of these clubs and electoral committees, see Alphonse Luca's 1851 classical study, *Les Clubs et les Clubistes*.
60. For a discussion of Léon Richer's relations with nineteenth-century feminists and the politics of the French League for Women's Rights (1882–1891), see Bidelman 1976.
61. Deroin to Léon Richer, *Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris*, Archives Marie-Louise Bouglé, Autographs, Carton 4247, (BHVP/AMLB/Au/CP4247/JD).
62. Deroin to Richer, letter dated 1857, (BHVP/AMLB/Au/CP4247/JD).
63. Deroin to Auclert, letter dated, January 10, 1886, (BHVP/AMLB/Au/CP4247/JD).
64. Ibid.

65. See Ranvier 1897, 1908, 1909; Thomas 1948; Adler 1979; Serrière 1981; Zerilli 1982; Riot-Sarcey 1989 and 1994; Scott 1996; Pilbeam 2003; Draper 2011.

Conclusion

Reassembling Radical Practices

'In rereading my letter I stay convinced of the necessity of a school of scientific utopianism, which will teach utopias of poetic grandeur [...] the ideal is possible',¹ Désirée Véret, veuve Gay, noted in a postscript to one of her last letters to Considerant, written from her apartment at St. Gudule place in Brussels on September 17, 1890. As already discussed in chapter 5, it was not the first time that she had written passionately about the political reality and importance of utopias, which she wanted to see elaborated and developed:

Let us found together or with our friends the school of scientific and social utopianism. Let us resuscitate the modern innovators. Utopia has been the mother of exact sciences and, like many fertile mothers she has often produced embryos that were sterile or too fragile, embryos born prematurely or under bad circumstances. Utopia is as old as the organised world. She is the vanguard of the new societies. And she will fashion society, harmony, when human genius makes it a reality through learned demonstrations that dissociate her from obscurities and temporary impossibilities.²

The revolutionary seamstress' deep conviction about the possibility of the ideal in the twilight of her life is striking. The way she related it to science is also important, while the feminine gender of utopia in the French language [l'utopie], nicely lends its grammatical form to the metaphor of the mother of sciences.³ In writing about the urgency of founding a school of scientific and social utopianism, the seamstress was fully aware of utopia's shortcomings: 'the fragile and/or sterile embryos'⁴ that were born from it; but she still had confidence in the radical futures that utopian and socialist ideals could open up. More importantly, she perceived the real as an assemblage of actualities and potentialities, things that have been realized and others that have not become concrete yet, but they inhere in the actualities of the present, opening up imaginary glimpses to the future. As I have elsewhere discussed at length (Tamboukou 2010b), such a perspective is very much in line with Deleuze's (2004) theorization of the real as a fusion of the actual and the virtual, an inflection of Bergson's philosophy of time that has also largely inspired current feminist theorizations of the imaginary (see Grosz 2004, 2005).

'What history gives us is the possibility of becoming untimely, of placing ourselves outside the constraints, the limitations and blinkers of the present', Elizabeth Grosz has pithily noted (2004, 117). In writing at the end of a fully active life, the seamstress had not only lived history, she had actually had time to reflect upon it.

Moreover, by having written political narratives herself and by having read those of her contemporaries she had learnt a lot from the historical events she had been entangled with: 'I am devastated with the new Belgian socialists. I think that the general strike is a utopia, a mere illusion. We must have an international congress',⁵ she wrote to Considerant. While reflecting upon the trends and programmes of the Belgian labour movement she was conscious of her position as a bystander: 'I am a simple spectator of the movement',⁶ she wrote, remembering the strikes in 1866 'when we were part of the [First] International'.⁷ In thus looking back at the ebbs and flows of the social movements and revolutions that she had been part of, the seamstress had some understanding about the possibilities of future formations and becomings. Hers was an eventful life, but because she had lived for so long, in so many different countries and through so many crucial eruptions and events, she could reassemble their traces left in the personal and political narratives of their protagonists:

The other day I was re-reading *The New Industrial World: The Theory of the Four Movements* and your work on *Social Destiny*.⁸ What serious pages to read. Although experimental, they explain the organisation of work much clearer than most brochures that are currently published.⁹

In rereading some of the important writings of both Fourier and Considerant, Véret-Gay was adamant that they should form the basis of a school of scientific and social utopianism that could help orientate the young writers and social leaders of Europe at the turn of the twentieth century: 'There is no shortage of young writers who are ready to enter a new road and search to orientate themselves. It is for us to put them in the right path',¹⁰ she wrote in the same letter above. In highlighting the responsibility of the older generation to educate and illuminate the youth, the seamstress was once again within the philosophical milieu of the *œuvre à faire*. As already discussed in chapter 6, the creator's responsibility for Souriau is to immerse herself in 'the will of the work' (2009, 208). It is in this context that he suggested the withdrawal of the

old to the young and/or of the teacher to the student in the area of education (ibid). In this light, creativity is a collective process since when we create we are never alone, Souriau argues (ibid., 215).

Through Véret-Gay's letters to Considerant we actually have a glimpse of the dialogue that goes on between the creator and the work that keeps raising questions and in doing so it guides and steers the process, opening up paths that lead to its final conrescence, a socialist world of peace and justice for the seamstress. In the same way that Souriau looks for the poet of 'the great, the immense poem that would fill human beings today' (ibid., 215), the seamstress looks for the founders of a school of scientific and socialist utopianism. Her quest throws a different light in the way the nineteenth-century French feminist movement has been read and understood: sometimes stifled under labels such as Saint-Simonianism or Fourierism, other times restricted within concepts such as 'the spiritual' or 'the paradox', as already discussed and criticized throughout the book.

What comes to light instead from the seamstresses' words and deeds is 'how matter matters' (Barad 2007) in the way the first autonomous feminist movement in Europe emerged and unfolded. It is here that their 'ephemeral' associations, short-lived publications and failed revolts have been perceived differently in the

light of process philosophy and the importance of the event: conceptual tools and theoretical perspectives that have informed the analysis throughout the book. As Whitehead has argued, ‘events are the ultimate realities’ (1967b, 236), occasions where something emerges into actuality. But the event is also configured as ‘a spatio-temporal unity with contemporaries (present), memories (past) and anticipation (future)’ (Whitehead 1967a, 72). It is within this philosophical framework that the seamstresses’ personal and political narratives are themselves conceptualized as events: they carry memory traces of revolutionary processes, illuminate the writers’ lived experiences and finally foreshadow future potentialities, then and now. As the seamstress Julie Fanfernot¹¹ poetically put it in the single brochure of *L’Étincelle* that she co-edited with Eugène Stourm in 1833:

Why is it that the brilliant image of those brief instants appears to be merely a fleeting vision in the dark labyrinth where we have come to stray? [...] The reason is that we, like those condemned to the mines, accustomed to the darkness like them, could not sustain the glare of such a bright light.¹²

In seizing the fleeting moments of revolutionary events that would have otherwise been forgotten and erased, such narratives become actual occasions wherein novel perspectives emerge: the seamstresses’ mode of rewriting history. The Foucauldian genealogical approach was catalytic in this archaeological process of excavating the seamstresses’ narratives. What surfaced as a niggling surprise is the messiness of the archive of nineteenth-century French seamstresses: its dispersion in many different archival places, its subordination and indeed suppression under different and confusing cataloguing practices. Documents were lost and found in famous libraries such as *la Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris*, and there does not seem to be a logic or some kind of system as to why some documents have been grouped or placed in the way they are, while there is no coordination between actual and digitized documents.¹³ Even more painfully, there are errors, discrepancies and inconsistencies in the feminist bibliography, while there are omissions of page references, issue numbers and even authors’ names in many bibliographical references of the existing feminist body of literature.¹⁴ The feminist archive in itself is an *œuvre à faire* for future feminist researchers and it is to this *œuvre* that I hope this book and its accompanying archival blog will be contributing.¹⁵

Revisiting the archive of nineteenth-century feminism with a sensitivity to the life of its life documents has opened up different vistas of conceptualization and understanding. In the process of the research that underpins the writing of this book I have allowed myself to drift along the rhythms of the documents that I have been reading, analysing and writing about. Following Lefebvre’s rhythmanalysis (2004), I have tried to listen to the rhythms of the documents I was reading, imagine the space/time continuum of their production, as well as the social and political conditions of their emergence.

Locating the various addresses of the first feminist newspaper was in itself a concrete experience in the spatiality and materiality of nomadism: it was from their homes that the seamstresses wrote and published, the same places where they would most probably work to make up for the meagre wages of their needlework. When an editor withdrew, the address would also change: 17 Rue du Caire was Jeanne-Désirée’s home for the first four issues; the newspaper then moved to 11 Rue du Feaubourg St Denis, Marie-Reines’s address after Jeanne-Désirée’s withdrawal.

Both addresses were at the heart of Sentier, the Parisian garment area industry, but when Voilquin became editor the social and political geography of the newspaper also changed: 26 Rue du Cadet and 37 Rue de Bussy (today Buci) were in much more elevated areas of Paris, since Voilquin's husband was an architect and she had climbed up to his social position. Finally, in its second year, the newspaper acquired a professional status with proper bureaus at 21 Rue des Juifs—Ferdinand Duval today.¹⁶ The geography of the newspaper thus reveals an intriguing history, or maybe the history of the journal can be starkly traced in its geography: its different addresses are thus the material traces of economic and social differences in the editorship, as well as in the theoretical and political orientation of the journal. Such differences were further inscribed in the themes, topics and debates of the journal that I have already discussed in chapter 3.

In retracing the seamstresses' steps and addresses in Paris in April 2015, I could still see and feel these differences: I could literally listen to their rhythms in the way Lefebvre (2004) has suggested that we should do. Hanna Hallgren (2015) has suggested that travelling should be taken as a method of inquiry, offering a detailed account of how travelling opens up space for experimenting with the possibilities and constraints of what we can know. Entangled in the speed of travelling, 'the "I/eye" is in the verb, in that the subject of the text is moving and is thus wrapped up in movement', Hallgren has argued (2015, 88), but she has also pointed to the fact that the situated position of the traveller researcher should be considered in terms of the perspectives that differences such as gender, race and class among others can facilitate or inhibit. Travelling to Paris during the last phase of writing the book opened up unexpected vistas in my understanding of the seamstresses' Parisian world, which went well beyond the final checking of the archival sources, which was initially my reason for going there.

By following the spatio/temporal rhythms of the first feminist newspapers, I could also see how they were deeply influenced by the turbulent politics of their times. *La Voix des Femmes* interrupted its publication a day after the disastrous results of the April 1848 elections. *La Politique des Femmes* was launched in the same week of the bloody June days: no surprise why it took a whole month for its second issue to appear and why it was forced to change its name after the July 29 decree that explicitly excluded women from the very experience of politics altogether. *L'Almanach des Femmes* was first published in Paris, but it was transferred to London after the harsh persecutions that followed Bonaparte's coup d'état in the end of 1851. If such conditions of possibility are not taken into consideration, this continuous change of names, addresses and editors seems like a pointless wandering and indeed loses the politically significant element of how much the nineteenth-century feminists were continuously ridiculed and persecuted not just by the state power, but also by their very socialist comrades. But apart from revealing the harshness of the political reality that the French feminists went through, the multiple geographies of the feminist newspapers are also traces of lines of flight, forces of deterritorialization and reterritorialization in the long revolutionary durée of the nineteenth century: they powerfully express the political force of nomadism.

Rhythms, both real and imaginary, are constitutive of our archival practices and therefore of the knowledges that can derive from them. One of the themes that has forcefully emerged from the seamstresses' genealogical archive is the importance of internationalization and the role of the labour movement in forging, supporting and sustaining universal ideas, as well as real and material links. Throughout the book I have followed the seamstresses and their sisters in struggle moving

around Europe, crossing the Atlantic, supporting each other in exile, translating each other's work, writing letters, signing petitions. Not only did the nineteenth-century feminist movement transcend national boundaries, it actually developed and unfolded within an international matrix, despite language barriers, travel restrictions and the many wars, revolutions and conflicts that shook Europe during this period. As Bonnie Anderson has succinctly observed, it is precisely its international character and perspective that 'makes this movement seem so modern' (2000, 2).

What is also striking is the current urgency of its historical demands and concerns: poverty and child raising, motherhood and domestic labour, education and job opportunities, prostitution and (modern) slavery, sexual violence and rape, the need for independence and autonomy both material and intellectual. It goes without saying that if we focus on women's position in the garment industry, the material milieu of the whole book, the similarities become unbearably disturbing, even uncanny. It is in the greyness of such difficulties that the seamstresses' revolutionary voices and their lifelong confidence in the power of joy, happiness, association and friendship sound so soothing, then and now:

I have had a life full of affections and passions but I found happiness alone and I have been able to unscrupulously evoke memories that social conventions have made me keep them hidden at the bottom of my heart for fifty years. My letters must have seemed to you unique but I needed you to know about the past and the present of my life so that we can talk and you can be a friend from whom I no longer have secret thoughts. Write to me about your ordinary days, about people and about brochures, I like chronicles!¹⁷

In responding to Jeanne-Désirée's desire for 'chronicles' I have thus chosen to conclude the book by drawing a cartography of space/time events in the long durée of nineteenth-century feminist praxis and thought. It is in the entanglement of macroscopic processes and microscopic events that the complexity, force and also contemporaneity of their movement powerfully emerges, as a feminist assemblage par excellence that surrounds and inheres in today's problematics, ideas, politics and imaginaries.