

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP

**Wittgenstein and the concept of ‘Woman’:  
Perspectives from Ordinary Language Philosophy, Art and History**

23-24 March 2023, Complutense University of Madrid  
Organized by Dr. Jasmin Trächtler, Dr. Isabel G. Gamero,  
Prof. Sandra Laugier and Camille Braune

Under the title “Wittgenstein and the concept of ‘Woman’: Perspectives from Ordinary Language Philosophy, Art and History”, we would like to invite women\* philosophers to use Wittgenstein’s philosophy to shed light on the troubled concept of “Woman”, linking conceptual, artistic and historical perspectives. This is the third event in the “[Wittgenstein and Women](#)” conference and workshop series, which aims, on the one hand, to make Wittgenstein’s philosophy fruitful for feminist thought and, on the other hand, to support Wittgenstein research by women.

The conference aims to broaden and diversify the scope of Wittgenstein scholarship, to challenge the supposed neutrality of philosophy along with its tendency towards androcentrism, by positioning ourselves from the perspective as woman\* Wittgensteinians. Through this positioning, we hope to gain new insights into what it means to be a “woman”. Allowing for the complexity and diversity of investigating the concept of “woman” and taking also into consideration the recent debates in transfeminism, we want to combine (linguistic-) philosophical approaches with historical, artistic or aesthetic perspectives.

The idea of using Wittgenstein’s philosophy for feminist ideas is a development, that began about thirty years ago, and has shown that Wittgenstein’s writings can be a rich resource for feminist philosophy. There is a large body of literature that rethought moral and political philosophy as well as social science coming from and with Wittgenstein, thus preparing the ground for more recent attempts to link Wittgenstein’s philosophy with feminist theory (including, e.g., Diamond 1991, Crary and Read 2000, Mouffe 2000, Scheman and O’Connor 2002, Zerilli 2005, Laugier, Provost and Trächtler 2022, and many more). Among the earliest explicit attempts is Cressida Heyes’ study *Line Drawings. Defining Women through Feminist Practice* (2000), where she argues with Wittgenstein for an anti-essentialist, more inclusive conception of the category “women”. The question of the drawing of boundaries with respect to categories and species is also discussed in the anthology *Re-Reading the Canon. Feminist Interpretations of Ludwig Wittgenstein* edited by Naomi Scheman and Peg O’Connor (2002).

These alternative approaches to the conference theme will be complemented by a workshop with presentations of women graduate students, where they can present their academic or artistic ideas and in-progress work. The workshop will be supervised by Astrid Wagner (CSIC, Madrid). You can read more about the workshop [here](#).

**Keynote speakers:**

Esa Díaz-León (University of Barcelona)  
Danièle Moyal-Sharrock (University of Hertfordshire)

To participate in the **conference**, please submit abstracts of max. 300 words through [this form](#) by **15 August 2022**. To participate in the **workshops**, please submit through [this form](#) by **15 August**. We kindly ask you to respect our format of woman\* speakers and to desist from submitting if you exclusively identify yourself as male.

In case you have any questions, please ask **Isabel G. Gamero** ([ig.gamero@filos.ucm.es](mailto:ig.gamero@filos.ucm.es)), **Jasmin Trächtler** ([jasmin.traechtler@tu-dortmund.de](mailto:jasmin.traechtler@tu-dortmund.de)) or **Camille Braune** ([camille.braune@etu.univ-paris1.fr](mailto:camille.braune@etu.univ-paris1.fr)). Read more on our series “[Wittgenstein and Woman](#)”.

## **Detailed Conference Outline**

We would like to discuss questions raised by this reflection on Wittgenstein and the concept of 'Woman' by bringing together perspectives from Ordinary Language Philosophy, Art and History.

### **Ordinary Language Philosophy**

In the *Blue Book*, Ludwig Wittgenstein questions our "craving for generality", which he defines as "the tendency to look for something in common to all the entities which we commonly subsume under a general term" (BB: 17). Starting from this postulation, ordinary language philosophy is defined as particular attention to the *uses* and *practices* of ordinary life, and to the way in which these *uses* and *practices* are expressed, and recomposed, *in* and *by* language.

Feminist theories have shown that ordinary language philosophy is fruitful for a new conception of ethics which marks "the necessity of bringing women's voices into ordinary human conversation" (Laugier 2022). If from a Wittgensteinian perspective, we consider the concept of "woman" in its various *uses*, we would like to observe what they include and exclude, without necessarily succumbing to the idea that the term is essentially exclusive. We would like to ask again the question formulated by Toril Moi in 1999: *What is a woman?* by considering the perspectives that this question raises today, especially in trans-, inter- and non-binary gender debates.

### **Art**

To answer the question what it means to be a "woman", we want to open up intersections between "purely philosophical" and artistic studies, following Stanley Cavell's work. In *Contesting Tears*, he explores the figure of the unknown woman in classic Hollywood cinema. His work on the struggles and difficulties of women in Shakespeare's tragedies serves him to review the philosophical problem of scepticism. How a woman might be known, listened or believed is one of the key questions in Cavell's work that connects, moreover, with current issues in philosophy such as epistemic justice, which we do not want to leave out of this conference.

In a similar vein and with an interdisciplinary intention, we would like to explore artistic works that were inspired by Wittgenstein, such as Thomas Bernhard's novels, Derek Jarman's films or Luis Felipe Noé's paintings; and ask if female artists have been inspired by this philosopher and how their work can contribute to answering our questions.

### **History**

By opening the conference theme to a historical perspective, we would like to focus in particular on the philosophical positions, situations, and perspectives of the women who lived and worked in Wittgenstein's historical and philosophical environment. Probably best known here, is the so-called Oxford Quartet, consisting of Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley and Iris Murdoch, who rebelled against a philosophy that was abstract, dominated by men, and detached from life.

Other women philosophers, now largely marginalized, have been directly or indirectly influenced by Wittgenstein's philosophy and made original contributions to analytic philosophy. These include the Cambridge philosophers Susan Stebbing, Alice Ambrose, Margaret Masterman and Helen Knight, the latter three of whom were also among the select group of students to whom Wittgenstein dictated his *Blue Book* and who wrote on logic, philosophy of language and aesthetics. Also to be mentioned is Susanne K. Langer, an American philosopher influenced by Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, who developed a comprehensive conception of logic as a study of symbols, while also addressing mythical female figures as well as specifically feminine symbols. By including these early analytic women philosophers, we would like to open the view for a philosophizing that moves beyond mainstream analytic philosophy.