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INTRODUCTION

Time is male/and in his cups drinks to the fair.

The words of Adrienne Rich eloquently capture the notion that Time as history is a male creation. Father Time holds the cup within which woman acquires meaning. The male enjoys a privileged position within the historical order; the roots of which are to be located in the tradition of Western metaphysics.

The character of the Western tradition can be deciphered by examining "the very grammar *by which* it thinks."¹ The subject, object, predicate construction circumscribes and defines the Western philosophical tradition determining, as one theorist suggests, "the terms of thought as well as the rules for thought."² From this familiar grammatical construction emerges the constituent components of the tradition. Among these are the notions of identity and representation.

¹ David B. Allison. *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), p.xxii.

² *Ibid.*

BODIES OF LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGES OF POWER:
FEMINISM AND ITS DISJUNCTIONS

by

Maria Vigilante

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in
partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Political Science

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

May 11, 1987

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"BODIES OF LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGES OF POWER:
FEMINISM AND ITS DISJUNCTIONS"

submitted by Maria Vigilante, B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Central to much feminist discourse is a confrontation with the tradition of Western metaphysics. A distinguishing feature between 'feminisms' is the character of this confrontation. This thesis examines the disjunction between the Anglo-American and the French feminist discourses focussing on their respective encounters with the tradition. It attempts to show that while the Anglo-American feminist discourse challenges the tradition's entrenched construct of woman, it does little to disturb the constituent categories which engender a certain female identity. The result is a re-inscription of the very tradition it seeks to challenge. The French feminists provide a more formidable challenge to the Western tradition because they seek to discredit the constituent categories that define it. The objective is to decipher the 'codes' and rules that determine the use and value of certain terms. The French feminists seek to undermine a metaphysical/linguistic foundation of which patriarchy is the superstructure.

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INTRODUCTION

Time is male/and in his cups drinks to the fair.

The words of Adrienne Rich eloquently capture the notion that Time as history is a male creation. Father Time holds the cup within which woman acquires meaning. The male enjoys a privileged position within the historical order; the roots of which are to be located in the tradition of Western metaphysics.

The character of the Western tradition can be deciphered by examining "the very grammar *by which* it thinks."¹ The subject, object, predicate construction circumscribes and defines the Western philosophical tradition determining, as one theorist suggests, "the terms of thought as well as the rules for thought."² From this familiar grammatical construction emerges the constituent components of the tradition. Among these are the notions of identity and representation.

¹ David B. Allison. *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), p.xxii.

² *Ibid.*

Representation within the Western tradition has been characterized by the subject/object dichotomy. It is a particular type of understanding that necessitates the subject/object distinction. That is, in order to be understood, a thing must be separated, objectified. The subject legislates to the object a mode of presence, designating how the object is to be known. From this grammatical formation emerges "a double axiomatic set (identity and causality)" which in turn gives rise to the entire scheme of binary oppositions entrenched in Western thought which constitute the "very threshold of metaphysics."¹

Within this system governed by binary oppositions such as time/eternity, good/evil, body/soul, human/divine, is the oppositional construct of male/female. The male assumes the position of subject which dictates a mode of presence to the female object. The two terms are locked into both an opposition and a hierarchy. The female category is caused by and identified through the male category, and thus the former is an absence but for the presence of the latter. The female is caught within a spell of identity.

Breaking this spell of identity is one of the fundamental objectives of the feminist project. Although it is misleading to speak of feminism as monolithic, central to much feminist discourse is a confrontation with the tradition of Western metaphysics. A distinguishing feature between 'feminisms' is the character of this confrontation. I have cho-

¹ *Ibid.*

sen to examine the disjunction between the Anglo-American and the French feminist discourses focussing on their respective encounters with the tradition. I will attempt to show that while the Anglo-American feminist discourse challenges the tradition's entrenched construct of woman, it does little to disturb the constituent categories which engender a certain female identity.- That is, while this discourse manages to discard many of the epi-phenomenal features of the tradition, it retains much of the structural core. The result is a re-inscription of the very tradition it seeks to challenge.

The French feminists provide a more formidable challenge to the Western tradition because they seek to discredit the constituent categories that define it. Unlike their Anglo-American counterparts, the French feminists are not particularly concerned with the character ascribed to the term 'woman' within the tradition. Rather, they seek to decipher the 'codes' and rules that determine the use and value of certain terms.

The foci for discussion within each discourse will be power and sexuality. Chapter One will examine the Anglo-American feminist discourse on power concentrating on the work of Mary Daly and Nancy Hartsock. In the subsequent discussion of power in Chapter Three Herbert Marcuse will be shown to be the quintessential example of a 'traditional' theorist of power who informs the work of Daly and especial-

ly of Hartsock. A radically different conception of power put forth by Michel Foucault informs much of the French feminists' work and will also serve to elucidate the deficiencies in the 'traditional' view of power.

The discussion in Chapters Two and Four is concerned more explicitly with theories of sexuality. Psychoanalysis provides the fundamental groundwork for both chapters. Freud serves as the basis for Juliet Mitchell's and Nancy Chodorow's theories of sexuality discussed in Chapter Two, whereas Jacques Lacan informs the work of the French feminists, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, discussed in the fourth chapter. For both Freud and Lacan entry into the symbolic order and the acquisition of sexual identity manifest themselves in terms of the phallic/non-phallic opposition. Lacan, however emphasizes the primacy of language, and this focus on language is assumed by both Kristeva and Irigaray. The French feminists seek to undermine a metaphysical/linguistic foundation of which patriarchy is the superstructure.

Chapter I

CONSCRIPTION OF THE BODY

Radical feminists have always seen power and sexuality as central to their analyses of women's oppression. This is hardly a distinguishing feature, however, since power and sexuality are fundamental considerations for most feminist discourse. Nonetheless, our analysis of radical and radical/socialist feminist discourse will illuminate features of and contentions between power and sexuality that are distinctive.

Power is of primary concern in this chapter. The notions of sexuality and power are not inextricably linked for all radical feminists. Indeed, radical feminists generally view sexuality as only one *aspect* of the power relations between the sexes. Such a view of the relation between sexuality and power necessarily embodies certain assumptions about the character of each.

The first part of this chapter will attempt to outline the conceptions of sexuality and/or power held by Mary Daly, prominent radical feminist. This discussion will be followed by and linked to the radical/socialist theory of power

put forth by the most prominent feminist theorist of power, Nancy Hartsock. In this second part of the chapter, I wish to reveal the common strands that draw these theorists together and point to the problems that their formulations of power present.

1.1 MARY DALY -- SPIRITUAL REVOLUTIONS/RESOLUTIONS

Imagine Her
 Goddess,
 robes flowing in folds as water carves
 smooth rhythms in stone on its path
 downward to the sea;
 throne, woven from the nest of a crane,
 under an arch of doves;
 castle, a cave, lions guarding the entrance;
 crown, a garland of alpine wildflowers
 gathered in the high meadows of her sacred moun-
 tain;
 cape of butterfly wings blowing
 iridescent in the half-light between
 sunset and the dark.

- Margaretta K. Mitchell¹

Patriarchy is itself the prevailing religion of
 the entire planet, and its essential message is
 necrophilia.

- Mary Daly²

Mary Daly's struggle partakes of the divine struggle
 between a biophilic goddess and a necrophilic god. Daly's
 works give feminists both reason for rejoicing and cause for
 bewilderment.

In the *The Church and the Second Sex* Daly focusses on the
 church as an archetypical patriarchal institution and
 attacks its misogynist doctrines. She made "some modest
 proposals" for equality within the Catholic Church but later

¹ M.K. Mitchell, Introduction to *Rising Goddesses*, Cynthia MacAdams. (New York: Morgan & Morgan, 1983).

² Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p.39.

came to view such reform as quaint and naive. She concluded that women aspiring to equality within the Church was "comparable to a black person's demanding equality in the Ku Klux Klan."³

Daly called for women to go "beyond God the Father." But the forces that support patriarchy are "so overwhelming and insidious" that women are "constantly tempted to wear blinders -- even in the very process of confronting sexism." The predictable result is a cooptable reformism which nourishes the oppressive system. The task Daly set for herself was "to study the potential of the women's revolution to transform human consciousness and its externalizations, that is, to generate human becoming." What is the foundation for such a program? Daly explicitly claimed that it was not her intent to "apply 'doctrine' to women's liberation."⁴

Nevertheless, she saw her work as "an effort to create theology," which necessarily implies foundational dogmatics. Her purpose was

to show that the women's revolution, insofar as it is true to its own *essential* dynamics, is an *ontological, spiritual* revolution, pointing beyond the idolatries of sexist society and sparking creative action in and toward transcendence. The *becoming* of woman implies *universal human becoming*. It has everything to do with the search for ultimate meaning and reality, which some would call God.⁵

³ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*., p.9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Daly's project is such that she seems in one sense to want to have humanism without God, and perhaps without tension altogether. She in fact articulates the death of God and

Beyond the idolatries, ultimate meaning does exist, but in a space that is *found* not formed. At this point in her thought, Daly believed that men, at least those who were "graceful" enough to have fallen into the new space could be part of the covenant. The universal human becoming that she envisioned was of a psychologically androgynous being who came "into living harmony with the self, the universe and God."⁶

In *Beyond God the Father* Daly conceived of a possible "osmosis" between the female and male psyche. Such optimism is absent in her subsequent work *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. Not only did the hope for androgyny have to be abandoned, but the very word itself was thought to be an abominable, confusing, misbegotten term that conveyed something like "John Travolta and Farrah Fawcett-Majors scotch-taped together." Among other terms that had to be left behind was God, because it represented the "necrophilia of patriarchy." Taking God's place is a goddess that "affirms the life-being of women and nature."⁷

the subsequent arrival of Zarathustra, that is, the will to power as the infinite malleability of this stuff erroneously called man. What she fails to acknowledge is that with the death of God, Man is gone too.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.172.

⁷ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology.*, p.xi.

Daly's bible offers us a new myth of origins presented as the truth of female 'Be-ing'. In the beginning there is the word. She creates a new gyno-centric language that can properly reflect women's 'gynergy'. This language is not simply a manifestation of alternate ways of thinking and speaking that demonstrates women's empowerment; nor is it intended to merely reveal the arbitrary nature of patriarchal language. Instead, it is presented as language rooted in *true* 'gynomorphic' being. The *false* words of the necrophilic God are replaced by the *true* words of the biophilic Goddess. The new decalogue tells us that thou shall not find salvation in "reconciliation with the father." For Daly radical feminism means

affirming our original birth, our original source, movement, surge of living. This finding of our original integrity is re-membering our Selves, Athena remembers her mother and consequently remembers her Self. Radical feminism releases the *inherent dynamic* in the mother-daughter relationship toward friendship, which is strangled in the male-mastered system.¹

Daly portrays women as essentially life-affirming and originally at one with nature. Men are the "monstrous jocks, male mothers (Murderers)" who are "dismembering a planet they have already condemned to death." They have "sought to replace the 'Tree of Life' with the necrophilic symbol of a dead body hanging on dead wood."²

¹ *Ibid.*, p.39. Italics mine.

² *Ibid.*, pp.17-18.

In her subsequent gospel, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*, Daly makes the necrophilic/biophilic antinomy more intense. Women are lusty, elemental creatures filled with "roary rhythms" who are blazing "open pathways to our background/homeland." The "act of rushing onward" towards a reunion with Mother Earth is constantly threatened by the "principalities of the Phallic State who continually connive to eradicate the Elemental Race, to reduce us to the state of possessions by pulling us up by our roots, making us rootless."¹⁰

Daly contends that the force of her elemental feminist philosophy is a rejection of the "tamed/tracked modes of thinking/feeling of phallocracy," and an affirmation of the "force of reason rooted in instinct, intuition, passion." She goes beyond merely providing poetic inspiration and enlightenment and claims that "feminism essentially means commitment to our past and future memories of Happiness in defiance of civilization."¹¹

1.2 Being on the Journey to Becoming

The 'journey' metaphor that pervades Mary Daly's texts may indeed find its source in the gnostic tradition, particularly as it is articulated by Heidegger. Although Daly

¹⁰ Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), pp.4-6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.7, 360. Italics mine.

would likely reject this suggestion, she is nonetheless, "a Self-proclaimed Nag-Gnostic", that is, one who "senses with certainty the reality of transcendental knowledge" and will "never cease to Nag [herself] and others with the recurrent awareness and uncertainty."¹²

The basic elements of gnosticism are to be found in Daly's thought. She offers women the promise of a gnosis -- a revealed salvational knowledge. Such knowledge will deliver women from a world "seen as an active, demonic potency personified in the image of the prince of this world."¹³ For Daly, the demon is the 'Prince of Patriarchy' who reigns over an evil-filled world within which woman's very being is at stake, let alone her prosperity. The gnostic symbols of 'strangeness', 'throwness', 'dread', 'noise', and the 'call' are incorporated by Daly and serve to both structure and sustain her female-centered project.¹⁴

¹² *Ibid.*, pp.414,12.

¹³ Susan Taubes, "The Gnostic Foundations of Heidegger's Nihilism", *The Journal of Religion*, Vol.34 No.3 (July 1954), p.159.

¹⁴ I rely on Susan Taubes' article (above) for an outline of the modern gnostic symbols. Daly's roots in modern gnosticism are patent. Her relationship to classical gnosticism, which is traditionally interpreted as being contramundane, is perhaps less clear. However, as Elaine Pagels points out, classical and early Christian gnosticism, while having the reputation of being other-worldly, were rooted in the identity of the divine and the self, the heavenly and the mundane. Whereas orthodox Jews and Christians insist that "a chasm separates humanity from its creator: God is wholly other," the gnostic maintains that "self-knowledge is knowledge of God; the self and the divine are identical" *The Gnostic Gospels* [New York: Vintage Books, 1981], p.xix). Similarly for Daly, to know the self (woman) is to know the mother-goddess.

In keeping with the gnostic symbol of 'strangeness' Daly depicts woman as profoundly and doubly estranged. She has been separated and thus estranged from her original source which was her home, and hence finds herself in a strange world where she feels herself a stranger and suffers for it. Daly uses the goddess Athena as the symbol of women's mistaken and violent entry into and experience of this antagonistic cosmos.

"Athena, the twice-born, who forgets and denies her mother and sisters, because she has forgotten her original self. 'Re-born' from Zeus ... she becomes the mutant who serves the master's purposes ... who in reality is enchained, possessed."¹⁵

Athena's "re-birth" is a manifestation of the gnostic symbol of 'throwness'. She is taken captive and 'thrown' into a world to which she has no connection. For Daly, this means that all women are condemned "to a living death, deadening the divine spark of be-ing, the Goddess within."¹⁶ What follows from this violent entry into an alien world is an overwhelming 'dread', which as Susan Taubes illustrates is a dread with "no specific object, [a] Dread of the world

¹⁵ Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, p.8. Regarding the birth of Athena, Robert Graves in *The Greek Myths:1*, informs us that "Plato identified Athene ... with the Libyan goddess Neith, who belonged to an epoch when fatherhood was not recognized." Whereas, the account by Apollodorus which says that Athena was born of Zeus and raised by the River-god Triton, is, according to Graves, "a late patriarchal version." Penguin edition, p.44.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.161.

as such, nourished by the self's isolation."¹⁷

The dread deepens as the estrangement intensifies. The gnostic view perceives a world that is not only alienating, but actively divisive and antagonistic, which serves to remove one further and further from her source. The world is filled with 'Noise' which is like "an orgiastic whirl whose major function is to shout out the voice of conscience in the self ... to deafen the self to its own voice."¹⁸

In Daly's view, patriarchal 'noise' not only sets up physical, spiritual, and intellectual barriers but speaks "deceptive tongues that prevent us [women] from hearing our Selves, as they [men] babble incessantly in the Tower of Babel which is the erection of phallocracy."¹⁹ Daly charts not only the deafening cacophony of patriarchal discourse, but the sadistic necrophilic tendencies displayed in history as illustration of a sustained attempt by men to divide, diminish, and ultimately destroy the Be-ing of women.

In *Gyn/Ecology* she provides gruesome accounts of ancient and modern barbarous rituals performed on women. She focuses on the rites of Indian suttee, Chinese foot-binding, African genital mutilation, European witch-burning and American gynecology. The intent is to "unmask the very real, existential meaning of Goddess murder in the concrete

¹⁷ Susan Taubes, "The Gnostic Foundations ...", p.159.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.160.

¹⁹ Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, p.4.

lives of women."²⁰

Ultimately, the 'Noise' defeats itself when it becomes so loud that it startles the Self out of its own stupor. With the awakening the 'Dread' dissipates and the 'Call' is heard beckoning the self to awaken. Awakening entails "the recollection and recognition of the source and the promise of the self's redemption from the world."²¹

The 'call' to women summons them to awareness of the many "layers/levels of erasure" which are intended to keep women from the "journey of finding their creative, divine Selves. In short, it is a call to "re-member female divinity."²² An absolute Self which is Woman waits to be re-discovered by the selves that have been dispersed in the world. Women must break through the compulsion of the cosmic patriarchal law and join the community of believers in rebellion against the world that seeks to trap them. The breakthrough will come as "radical feminist consciousness spirals in all directions, dis-covering the past, creating/dis-closing the

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.111.

Of particular interest with regard to the sado-rituals is that women were/are often "cast into the role of each other's torturers and mutilators." This is especially the case with Chinese foot-binding and genital mutilation. Closer to home are examples of pimps using their older, tougher prostitutes to beat up the novices, and mothers diligently training daughters to alter their physical appearance so as to better fit the feminine role. Daly claims that men were/are the "agents behind the mutilation, demanding it and enforcing it, deceptively using their mindbound women to execute their wishes." (p.138.)

²¹ Taubes, "The Gnostic Foundations ...", p.160.

²² Daly, *Gyn/Ecology.*, pp.130-131.

present/future."²³ Daly's language of 'dis-closure' bears close resemblance to Heidegger's language of 'aleitheia' -- the unhidden or unconcealed.

In Heidegger's thought, the self lives in an inauthentic realm, in 'untruth'. This "untruth is the veiling of the Being." To live in the world is to live in error, and only upon discovering the 'errdom' are the possibilities of truth open. Heidegger views history as the "progressive concealment of the truth of Being."²⁴

Daly seems to hold the same interpretation of history with the substitution of Heidegger's 'Being' with 'Female Being'. Moreover, history is a specifically female history. For both, the 'unconcealedness' of Being is dynamic -- it entails and constitutes a movement which in itself is redemptive. While moving toward Being the 'untruth' is being exorcised and the 'truth' revealed. Like Heidegger's, Daly's emphasis is on the process of becoming. The trajectory itself is "ec-static" and authenticating. The voyage sees women 'spinning' and 'passing' through the 'phallogratic maze', and the "Other side of this Otherworld Journeying is dis-covered at every turn." It requires women to speak in "various modes: Spooking, Sparking, Spinning ... a moving pattern, a spiraling of counterparts, a harmony of hearing and speaking" wherein women's "acts of exorcising are Rites

²³ *Ibid.*, p.1.

²⁴ Susan Taubes, "The Gnostic Foundations ...", pp.169-171.

of passage."²⁵

Although the focus remains on the dynamic 'unconcealing' and 'disclosing' of Being, it is nonetheless the very existence and essence of Being that makes the journey possible. In Daly's case what makes the eschatological sisterhood possible is the shared knowledge of a cosmic female Being or Goddess. Knowledge of the Goddess (who is needed for salvation) is the gnosis that Daly offers. The attainment of the gnosis represents a solution for women because it promises to free them from the grips of an antagonistic patriarchal world.

The gnosis also reveals to women the Truth about themselves. As in all gnostic teaching, knowledge of the divine (Goddess) brings knowledge of the self, and vice versa. In knowing of and journeying toward her source Woman comes to know her own essence.

²⁵ Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, pp.33-34.

With regard to the devices that one employs on the journey: Spooking means "re-calling, re-memembering/reclaiming [the] Witches' power to cast spells ... to enthrall, to bewitch"; Sparking is "igniting the divine Spark in women."; Spinning is "the power of spirit spiraling, whirling." (pp.318-320.)

I should also note here that advice on, and the necessity of Spooking, Sparking, and Spinning comprise the entire third and final section of *Gyn/Ecology*. Daly here assumes the role of the gnostic messenger of life who is here to transmit the 'truth' to those who can 'hear' and thus offer instructions for gaining salvation.

1.3 Battles of Principalities and Powers

In his study of gnosticism Hans Jonas points out that the aspiration of the gnostic individual was not to "act a part in [the] whole, but ... to 'exist authentically'."²⁶ Daly's work represents both an affirmation of the existence of Woman's authenticity and an actual quest for the authentic life. The source of women's *authenticity*, and thus of their power is 'Elemental Lust'. Unlike the "obsession and aggression" of "phallic lust", the 'Lust' of women is "pure passion: unadulterated, absolute, simple sheer striving for abundance of be-ing." As such it is unmediated by the fabrications of phallocracy and entails "connecting with auras of animals and plants, moving in planetary communion with the farthest stars."²⁷

Men are constructed by Daly as such that they are incapable of communion with the natural and astral universe, and aware of their deficiencies they continually connive "to destroy" women's connections with the elements and with [their] Elementally Spirited Selves." If they cannot altogether appropriate women's powers they then draw upon these powers and use them against women.²⁸

²⁶ Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*. Second Ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p.330.

²⁷ Daly, *Pure Lust*, pp.1-5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.185.

The entire drama sees men 'taming' and 'draining' the Elemental powers of women: the desired result being that any resistance to the destruction via the exercise of original powers is no longer possible. Males, according to Daly, fear the 'spiritual strength' of women and in it recognize their own impotence. As she makes evident, their fear is mixed with dread.

Women who are unveiling the Archimage, Realizing active potency, are unleashing Archaic powers. To be actively potent is to Realize/release that which is most Dreadful to the impotent priests, the prurient patriarchs -- our participation in Be-ing.²⁹

Unlike fear, dread is without a specific object. In Daly's view, men may fear the manifested strengths and capacities of women, but they dread their connection to a Goddess/Source who is entirely Other and unknowable to men. Patriarchal power then must seek to cut women's ties to their Source making them rootless, vulnerable and powerless. Male desire to thwart women's participation in Be-ing is not, however, inspired solely by fear or dread. Daly's construct of a female essence is in opposition to a male essence of which we are told few, but essential details. Men are posited as profoundly antinomial to women, "demons of division that cut women's Lifetimes/Lifelines into tidy tid-bits." They are intrinsically evil: no less than "manifestations of antispirit/antimatter."³⁰

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.188-189. Italics mine.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.292-293. Although I cannot do it here, it would be interesting to pursue Daly's gnostic framework

Daly presents us with the immutability of female and male sexual natures: sexual because men and women universally acquire their particular essence by virtue of their sex. The male essence portrayed as a dominating, destructive instinct (thanatos) appears to live authentically in this world. In contrast, the female essence as creative, biophilic, life-affirming instinct (eros) is estranged in this world and therefore must seek authentic life elsewhere.¹¹

1.4 Negations/Conflations

Conflated with the respective depictions of sexual nature are accounts of the workings of power. As we have seen, the source of women's power is with a Goddess from whom they are estranged. Salvation lies with the homebound journey to the Source. Making the voyage requires a certain exercise of power by women in the form of keen awareness of and resistance to the workings of patriarchal power which keeps women from knowing their Source. What is necessary then is a negation of patriarchal discourse.¹² In modern feminist parlance, Daly sees women as oppressed precisely because the exercise of their creative biophilic powers has been sup-

more thoroughly with regard to this notion of the antispirit manifested by men.

¹¹ A fuller discussion of thanatos and eros will be taken up in the discussion of power in Chapter Three.

¹² Patriarchal discourse encompasses language, activities, and institutions (although one can identify non-discursive institutions). These concepts will be dealt with more thoroughly in the discussion of Foucault in Chapter Three.

pressed by the overbearing exercise of patriarchal power.

Daly's construction embodies a number of assumptions about the nature and relations of power that I wish to consider more thoroughly in the latter part of this chapter. There are several other questions that Daly's work prompts. What are her grounds for positing the inauthenticity of this world for women and the authenticity of another realm of Being? Secondly, why are we to believe that the long lost Goddess -- the lost absence -- will restore herself in presence? Even if we witness the restoration of the lost absence, is it not still an inscription of that absence within presence? I will attempt to deal with these questions in the subsequent discussion, as well as in the third and fourth chapters.

1.5 NANCY HARTSOCK -- POLITICAL COMMUNITY AND EROTIC IDEALS

Power is the salient category ... Its primacy in feminist thinking is understandable and necessary. But our ways of thinking about power may now be hampering us."¹¹

Nancy Hartsock recognizes that "the subject of power has not received sustained feminist attention" and thus sets herself the task of addressing "questions of power more directly" in her 1983 work *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism*.¹⁴ Hartsock's work is of particular importance to my analysis for several reasons. First, she is perhaps the most prominent among the few, so called, feminist theorists of power. Second, *Money, Sex, and Power* was itself greeted with significant enthusiasm: "No other writer to date has faced so directly questions of the relation of political power and theories of power to gender and class, and offered so much material for formulating answers."¹⁵ Third, while she claims to have "benefitted from the growing debate over the nature of a feminist sexuality," she claims to put forth an account not of sexuality

¹¹ Judith K. Gardiner, "Power, Desire, and Difference: Comment on Essays from the *SIGNS* Special Issue on Feminist Theory," *SIGNS*, Vol. 8 No. 4 (Summer 1983), p. 735.

¹⁴ Nancy Hartsock, *Money, Sex, and Power: Towards a Feminist Historical Materialism*. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1983), pp. 1-2.

¹⁵ *Ethics* reviewer, back cover of *Money, Sex, and Power*.

but of "the association of sexuality with power."¹⁶

Ultimately, she does present us with her own account of sexuality. In fact, her entire argument about 'gendered' power relations depends on her account of male and female sexuality. I shall attempt to demonstrate, however that Hartsock's treatment of the 'sexuality debate' and its consequences for her argument regarding power relations is problematic. Moreover, I shall argue that the configurations of power by women that she puts forth as 'alternative', not only remain within the traditional discourse on power (feminist and non-feminist), but appear to be out of place, and ineffectual within Hartsock's discussion.

1.6 Alternative Configurations or Reformulated Positions

Money, Sex, and Power is divided into two main sections; the first is concerned with men, class, and power; the second with women, gender, and power. In the first half of the book Hartsock focuses on the theories and critiques of power put forth within the mainstream male tradition: Lasswell and Kaplan, Parsons, Dahl, Polsby, Bachrach and Baratz, Steven Lukes, Milliband, and Poulantzas.¹⁷

¹⁶ Hartsock, *Money, Sex, and Power*, pp. ix., 155.

¹⁷ See *Money, Sex, and Power* Part 1 -- pp. 1-144. This entire first section is essentially a neo-Marxist critique of the pluralist view of power. Hartsock seems to have stayed within the conventional framework of discussion, that is, a revival of old debates on class and power that do not appear to be particularly necessary to the second section of the book in which she focuses more

The "influential mainstream theorizations of power" and the "important critiques" of them are given substantial consideration by Hartsock because "these theorists ... move us step by step closer to a more accurate and adequate account of relations of class domination in advanced capitalist societies."³⁸ She works through these arguments on power and class domination with the belief that a "Marxist account can resolve many of the problems posed by other theories of power." This pluralist/neo-Marxist debate represents for Hartsock "an important progression toward ... the construction of an adequate theory of power, one that can understand the gendered as well as class nature of power."³⁹ She carries this view forth into the second half of her work where issues of gender and power become central.

1.7 Influential Associations -- Power and Eros

Hartsock begins her analysis of power and gender by suggesting that a useful point of entry would be eros, because "like power relations, relations structured by eros involve the establishment of relations with others ... like exercises of power over others [they] represent the creation of community."⁴⁰ Relations of eros (presumably like other types of relations) provide Hartsock with interesting ground for

directly on issues of gender and power.

³⁸ Hartsock, *Money, Sex, and Power*, p.80.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.138-139.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.155. Italics mine.

inquiry because they play a role in forming the community. She portrays the relation of power and eros as an "association" wherein sexuality is seen as the "sexual dimension of power."⁴¹ As such, sexuality does not seem indispensable to the discussion of power and gender, but rather appears to have been included as a matter of preference, perhaps because it is a salient dimension of power that provides Hartsock with particularly graphic illustrations of the character of the patriarchal community which she depicts. Sexuality or relations of eros are portrayed by Hartsock as a vehicle of expression, or one of the manifestations of certain power relations, but not as constitutive of or integral to these power relations.

1.8 Divergent Experiences -- Male/Female Sexuality

Hartsock adopts the view of sexuality as "culturally and historically defined and constructed" and thus as "relational."⁴² Social relations, she claims, have been such that hostility, violence, and domination are central components of sexual excitement, as opposed to warmth, intimacy, and sensual pleasure. What becomes historically and socially evident is that the emphasis on sexual domination largely appears to be a masculine concern whereby the woman is the victim.⁴³

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp.155, 166.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.156.

⁴³ By historical and social evidence, Hartsock includes for

Hartsock uses Robert Stoller's *Sexual Excitement* to demonstrate that psychologically the dynamics of sexual excitement for men are more motivated by hostility than they are for women, in both perverse and more 'normal' sexual practices.⁴⁴ Stoller asks why perversion (gross hostility or eroticized hatred) is more prevalent in men? Furthermore, he asks whether "in humans (especially males) [powerful sexual excitement can ever exist without brutality also being present?" His study shows that the element of hostility (even if disguised in fantasy) is central to men's potency and sexual excitement. Hartsock argues that the dynamics of violence which are part of male sexual excitement have come to be understood as those of "normal" heterosexual excitement. "What we treat as sexuality and sexual excitement is a gendered masculine sexual excitement." The language of sexual relations (among other social evidence) is demonstrative of the focus on the male experience of sex within the central institution of 'normal' sexuality, heterosexual

example, theoretical and fictional literature, male fantasies, acts of violence and rape, and the language of sexual relations itself.

⁴⁴ Although Hartsock does not adhere to all the meanings attached to Stoller's view of perversion, it is of interest to us here. He defines perversion as "the erotic form of hatred ... the wish to do harm - not by simple aggression or forcefulness." For Stoller, "the more gross the hostility, the less the question that one is dealing with perversion." For example he sees murder, rape, sadism, binding games, defecating or urinating on a woman "on a lessening scale of conscious rage toward one's sex object, in which an essential purpose is for one to be superior to, harmful to, triumphant over another."

Cited in *Money, Sex, and Power*, p.161.

intercourse. In polite language, the "male's primary focus for sexual stimulation is inserted in the vagina and ends with male orgasm," and in vulgar language the way of describing the encounter would be, "he fucked her."⁴⁵

Hartsock draws on other 'social evidence' such as rape, violent pornography, literature, and sociological studies to demonstrate that the "dynamics of hostility that structure sexual excitement corresponds to a masculine sexuality that depends on defiling or debasing a fetishized sexual object" who is usually (but not always) a woman. Violence against and domination of women is seen as a source of sexual excitement for men which leads many feminists to conclude that even the "normal male is sexually aggressive in a brutal and demeaning way."⁴⁶

1.9 Aspects of Eros -- Sources of Community

The focus in Hartsock's discussion shifts from the expression of male sexuality to its source which she defines as an "aspect of eros." She points to three aspects of eros which she claims are at the source of "the organization and construction of community." Each aspect can take either a

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.162-163.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.164-165.

The point that sheer violence and brutality against women is a source of sexual excitement is explicitly evident in pornographic snuff films wherein the big draw is not only the depiction of a woman's death and dismemberment, but that the actress is actually killed on camera. See Beverly La Belle, "Snuff - The Ultimate in Woman-Hating," in *Take Back the Night*, ed. Laura Lederer (New York: Morrow, 1980), cited in *Ibid.*, p.182.

'positive' or a 'negative' form and thus manifest itself in the society that it inspires. By formulating her discussion around these aspects of eros, Hartsock hopes to "highlight the relation of sexuality to issues of power and community."⁷

The first aspect of eros relates to Freud's notion of eros as the "aim of making one out of many," which may manifest itself in the "narrowly genital form or ... other sublimated forms." The repression of this aspect of eros (sexual impulses) is required for civilization to develop. The second aspect of eros relates to "the role given to sensuality and bodily concerns in social life." Hartsock claims that this aspect of eros has found little room for expression in traditional public life of Western culture and points to Plato's primary concern for the properly ordered soul as a significant illustration. Finally she defines a third aspect of eros as "creativity and generation -- whether intellectual creativity in philosophy and art, physical work on the substances of nature, or the generation of children through sexual relations." All of these activities point to a pleasure that is derived from "acting in the world."⁸

Within each aspect of eros Hartsock sees the possibilities for either a 'liberatory' or 'repressive' form of eros whereby the latter points toward death, and the former

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.166.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.166-168.

toward life. For example,

the desire for fusion with another can take the form of domination of the other. Sensuality and bodily pleasures can be denied, and ... creativity and generation can also take forms of domination both in the world of work, where creative activity becomes alienated labor or in reproduction, in which the creation of new life becomes either disembodied or recast as death.⁴⁹

Hartsock uses pornography as a locus in which to examine the negative dynamics within each of these aspects of eros. In the first aspect, desire for fusion turns into a desire to dominate a "threatening other" who is threatening specifically because she is separate, distinct, and opposed. In order to "reduce the danger of fusion or intimacy, pornography substitutes control ... the woman is controlled, mastered, and humiliated." At issue is the "dynamic of conquest and the thrill of overcoming a resistant will." Another method of control (among many) in order to avoid genuine fusion and intimacy is fetishism, which "avoids confronting the will by fantasizing the other as a thing rather than a human being, treating a body part as a substitute for the person, or even dispensing with the human being altogether." Forbidding women to speak, silencing them is also a central theme of pornography. Still another is the dynamic of what Hartsock terms "reversal/revenge" in which the man sees himself as the victim and must get revenge against women he views as dangerous and threatening.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.168.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.169-171.

With regard to the second aspect of eros, the negative dynamic is denial of sensuality and bodily pleasures so that pleasure is obtained by transgression. Hartsock points to the body/mind duality created and reinforced by pornography. The pornographer's desire to impute shame in the victim's body, to degrade and defile her body. The spiritual love/carnal knowledge dichotomy is reinforced by the fantasy of transforming the pure, innocent virgin into a whore. Pleasures of the flesh are obtained only by force or transgressions which can comprise anything from rape to striptease and peep shows. Hartsock claims that when they take repressive form, sensuality and bodily concerns "become entangled with and point toward death ... death of feeling as well as death of the body."⁵¹

In terms of the third aspect of eros, pornography illustrates the negative dynamic by transforming creativity and generation into danger and malevolence. There exists a genre that Andrea Dworkin terms "the pornography of pregnancy" in which pictures of pregnant women and accompanying text depict women as for example, "the triumph of the phallus over the death-dealing vagina."⁵² Norman Mailer once said that "sexual intercourse had lost its gravity (in part?) because pregnancy had ceased to be dangerous," which implies that pregnancy -- the triumph of the phallus/potent sperm -- not only makes evident that the virgin has been

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp.172-173.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.174-175.

defiled but that she has been rendered vulnerable to death by the dangers that accompany pregnancy.

Hartsock's analysis leads to the conclusion that these negative forms of all the three aspects of eros are predominantly associated with men. In effect then, what has been depicted are negative expressions of eros which can be consolidated and described more precisely as 'masculine eros'.

1.10 Masculine Eros and Male Power

In the community constructed by a masculine eros, the will of the other must be conquered and destroyed over and over again.⁵³

Masculine eros, contends Hartsock, manifests itself as 'gender-specific' power in the realm of sexuality, but is obviously not limited to the sphere of sexual relations. Power rooted in masculine eros structures the world as we know it upon the ideals of conquest, domination, and even a fascination with death. Hartsock describes such a world as an "agonal community" in which the "opposition of men to women, ... [rests] on a deepgoing threat to existence" and where the "gain of one participant can come only at the expense of the other's submission, humiliation, or even death."⁵⁴

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.177.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.177-178.

The Greek polis is seen as exemplary of a political community constructed on the foundation of, negative, or masculine eros. Moreover the masculine erotic ideals are to be found in the ancient texts from the Homeric epics through the tragedians to Plato and Aristotle. The public world of Homer existed on the battlefield, while that of Plato and Aristotle was the polis: both provided the ground or space for the display of specifically masculine eros, or virtue.

In the Homeric warrior-hero as well as the citizen of the polis, Hartsock sees each aspect of eros taking the negative form. In the first aspect, his quest for victory and honour requires the domination or even death of his opponent. With regard to sensuality and the body, except as a vehicle for battle, the body is ignored and irrelevant to the primary concern of the warrior which is honour. This is intimately connected to the third aspect of eros, generation and creativity. The Homeric hero is shown to exist separate from daily concerns of necessity where his body may be required both for sustenance, as well as for generation of others. Instead, his lack of concern for life is replaced by a fascination with death whereby he may assure his immortality with an honourable physical death.

The dichotomy between the public world of virtue and the private world of necessity (oekonomia) is further reinforced in the polis. However, it is not a case of mere opposition, but of dependency. In order to be admitted to the public

realm as a citizen, the male must first be master of a household of women, children and slaves. The polis and the oikos coexist, but in perpetual tension. Again with reference to Hartsock's aspects of eros, we witness in the first instance the domination by the male citizen in two realms. In the household he rules unchallenged over unequals whose submission he requires. In the polis he is in the company of equals, but is nonetheless involved in a struggle for mastery and domination every time he displays his "courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom." In terms of bodily concerns and sensuality the virtuous male citizen is disembodied. Material appetites are expressed and fulfilled in the household thus freeing the citizen from his body in order that he display the excellences of his mind and soul in the polis. Likewise, the creativity and generation represented by labour and progeny, while necessary to the sustenance of the polis and its citizens are deemed inferior in comparison to the generation of disembodied, but memorable (philosophy, oratory, heroism) or permanent (art, architecture) works in the public realm.

The dichotomy, opposition, and hierarchy of body and soul are ever-present in the Platonic dialogues. In the *Symposium*, Socrates, relaying Diotima's account of love and beauty, tells his audience that

Those who are pregnant in the *body only*, betake themselves to women and beget children -- this is the character of their love; ... But *souls* which are *pregnant* -- for there are certainly men who are more creative in their souls than in their

bodies -- conceive ~~that~~ which is proper for the
 scul to conceive or contain ... wisdom and vir-
 tue."⁵⁵

Even for such a feminine character as Socrates (and he had many who accused him of this trait), women are separated from, if not antithetical to, the pursuit of virtue. In its very etymology, virtue (with its root 'vir' or man) is defined as manliness, and thus as courage, excellence, mastery, and honour; all attributes of virtue are specifically male-defined ideals and thus expressions of masculine eros.

1.11 The Other Story -- Feminine Eros and Female Power

Hartsock's intent is to make clear that the political community, ~~we~~ we understand it, is structured on deeply-rooted forms of negative eros that find their source in Ancient Greece. Her point is that

eros and power are deeply connected, and when eros takes negative, masculine forms that point toward death rather than life, the community as a whole will be structured by those dynamics.⁵⁶

The negative/masculine forms of eros are at the heart of a society where the male gender rules, and where the social reality for women is that they are victims of rape, sexual murders, and so forth. Power in such a society is defined as domination, which for Hartsock implies the repression, denial or death of the Other, in this case Woman.

⁵⁵ Plato, *Symposium*, Jowett trans. Gateway Editions, 1953, p.123. Italics mine.

⁵⁶ *op.cit.*, p.202.

According to Hartsock, there are other possibilities. She envisions a more "humane" community which would be structured by "forms of eros that express women's experience" and thus would stress "those aspects of power related to energy, capacity and potential," that is, positive or feminine forms of eros: She adheres to the poet Audre Lorde's belief that women could "recapture the possibilities ... in the mythic personage of Eros -- 'born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony ... an assertion of the life-force of women.'"⁵⁷

The most obvious experience of women that embodies the ideals of bodily pleasures, sensuality and creativity is pregnancy, parturition, and nurturance. Hartsock claims that a reformulation of power; that is, a more "liberatory theory *must* be located at the epistemological level of reproduction." Reproduction as a focus would make evident the character of positive/feminine forms of eros, which in terms of the 'three aspects' of eros are: embracing fusion and intimacy, acknowledging sensuality and bodily concerns, and affirming life through generation. The female world of reproduction and mothering *implies* the existence of a female relational world that Hartsock believes could be the "base for a reunderstanding of power and community."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.210, 255.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.256-259.

Hartsock's intent is to locate both women's oppression and liberatory possibilities on a specific material and historical ground. The aspiration being that a "specifically feminist historical materialism ... would provide answers for women akin to those Marx's account of class domination provided for workers."⁵⁹

The point being then that women's 'consciousness' is formed by the material basis of women's existence which, while including work and other activities, is focused in reproduction. These activities are the source of "women's perspective" and thus the basis for a specifically "feminist standpoint" which also emerges because the contradiction between the "systematically differing structures of men's and women's life activity" becomes evident. Furthermore, the "feminist standpoint" allows women to expose "the world men have constructed and the self-understanding that manifests these social relations as both partial and perverse. Hartsock is particularly close to Mary Daly's formulation with the contention that women's

experience of continuity and relation -- with others, with the natural world, of mind with body -- provide an ontological base for developing a non-problematic social synthesis, ... that need not operate through the denial of the body, the attack on nature, or the death struggle between the self and other, ... that does not depend on any of the forms taken by abstract masculinity."⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.254.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.246-247.

1.12 Epistemology/Ontology

The problem with Hartsock's position is that her claims that women's experience of the world provides them with an ontological as well as epistemological base for creating different social relations centred on reproduction is difficult, if not impossible, to sustain.

Hartsock herself appears to realize the difficulty of supporting the claims. In one of the final chapters of her work titled "An Alternative Tradition: Women on Power", she seems to be struggling to find solid ground on which to locate her contention that women's experience of the world provides them with an authentic alternative view of power. Hence she enlists the support of Hannah Arendt and Dorothy Emmet (both 'respectable' members of the tradition of political thought) as illustrations of women theorists who conceive of power similarly to Hartsock, that is, stressing the notions of capacity and potential. Hartsock claims that she was not able to "discover any women writing about power who did not focus on the creative aspects." But this is, at best, 'circumstantial' evidence, evidence which is epistemologically suspect on at least two counts: first, because of men who conceive power creatively and yet obviously did not derive their accounts from a woman's experience of the world, and second, because of feminists like Shulamith Firestone and to a lesser extent Simone de Beauvoir, who see the increased power of women as resting on their denial/

rejection of their reproductive capacities, corporal and symbolic.

In a 1976 interview entitled "*The Second Sex: thirty years on*," Simone de Beauvoir said.

one should not believe that the female body gives one a new vision of the world. That would be ridiculous and absurd. That would mean turning it into a counter-penis.⁶¹

For Beauvoir, inscribing the body with such meaning is to posit an 'eternal feminine', which she views as descending into a mystical discourse which only serves to further obscure the workings of power.

The 'eternal feminine' is in effect posited by both Daly and Hartsock: the former with her notion of women's "essential dynamics" and the latter with her reference to "feminine" or "positive eros." Moreover, for both theorists, women's essence is denied or exploited by the male-mastered system of power or patriarchy. The authentic, biophilic and creative female essence is understood to be threatened with death by the necrophilic masculine eros.

Patriarchal power is thus depicted as a monolithic and dominating force. Despite the workings of patriarchal power, we are led to believe that feminine eros remains intact, albeit repressed and perverted in its manifestations. While feminine erotic or sexual nature may be obscured by patriarchal forces, even at times deformed, it still manages to

⁶¹ Simone de Beauvoir, "*The Second Sex: thirty years on*," in *After The Second Sex: Conversations with Simone de Beauvoir*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p.79.

exist authentically, 'associated' with, but still separate from and external to the realm of power -- an immutable female nature. Hence the possibility for a genuine, alternative formulation of power based on a female essence.

Michel Foucault, who will be discussed in Chapter Three, is not alone in his understanding, pace Hartsock and Daly, that the productive capacities of power reach beyond mere repression or domination, into the core of being. In Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*, Shug Avery tells the protagonist, Celie, that power

don't look like nothing...It ain't a picture show.
It ain't something you can look at apart from anything else, including yourself.⁶²

⁶² Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*. (New York: Harcourt Bruce Jovanovich, 1982), p.167.

Chapter II

THE BODY AS HOMELAND

Do we truly need a *true* sex? With a persistence that borders on stubbornness, modern Western societies have answered in the affirmative.

- Michel Foucault¹

In the Oedipus complex there is the repressed desire to kill the father and marry the mother, while in the matrilineal society of the Trobriands the wish is to marry the sister and to kill the maternal uncle.

- Bronislaw Malinowski²

The notion of homeland is intended to act as a metaphor in the subsequent discussion of sexuality. Homeland evokes images of roots, beginnings, identity, belonging, cohesion, and authenticity, among others. Relations between a subject and his/her patria can in one way be characterized by presence and absence, fusion and individuation. I should like

¹ Michel Foucault, *Introduction to Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth Century Hermaphrodite*, trans. Richard McDougall (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p.vii.

² Bronislaw Malinowski, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (New York: Meridian, 1955 [1927]) cited in Judith Lorber "On The Reproduction of Mothering: A Methodological Debate" *SIGNS* vol. 6 no. 3 1981: p.486.

to suggest that similar relational dynamics are contained within much of feminist psychoanalytic discourse with regard to the body and sexuality.

The discussion of sexuality in the previous chapter was intended to serve in an illustrative fashion to better illuminate the respective discourses on power. Sexuality -- specifically the Anglo-American discourse -- is of central concern in the present chapter with a focus on the work of Juliet Mitchell and Nancy Chodorow.

Much of the feminist debate surrounding these theorists questions their privileging of psychoanalytic modes of interpretation over biological or sociological ones. The entire debate over whether the 'sex-gender system' (sociological, psychological, cultural, biological) can even be separated, let alone be placed in a hierarchy, constitutes an important discussion. Nonetheless, it is not the present concern. Rather, I should like to remain within the psychoanalytic discourse and question the privileging of certain sovereign symbols of interpretation. Let us begin by mapping out the character of these symbols, and subsequently exploring the significance and consequences of their sovereignty.

2.1 JULIET MITCHELL -- RE-OPENING THE DEBATE

The present positions within the feminist, psycho-analytical discourse constitute a rich, dynamic and sophisticated debate. This was not always the case. The early years of the 'second wave' of feminism were marked mostly by vehement attacks on Freud that often led to a complete rejection of his psycho-analytic discourse. Liberal feminists like Betty Friedan joined such radical feminists as Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer, Shulamith Firestone, Eva Figes, and Kate Millet in accusing Freud of rationalizing women's subordination with "theories that pose as science."¹ It was not until 1974 with the appearance of Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* that a sophisticated debate was opened.

Mitchell has been accused by some feminists of being "more Freudian than Freud."² She comes to his defence, and even manages to undermine some previous feminist critiques by arguing that Freudian psycho-analytic theory provides a "means of explaining" rather than a "means of justifying" women's inferior 'estate'.³

¹ Aafke Koomter, "Feminism and Psychoanalysis," *A Creative Tension: Explorations in Socialist Feminism*, eds. A. Meulenbelt, et. al. (London: Pluto Press, 1984), p.61.

² *Ibid.*, p.71.

³ Amy Gutmann, "Freud versus Feminism," *Dissent*. (Spring 1979), p.204.

In the first section of *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* Mitchell offers a sophisticated and compelling exposition of Freud's theory of sexuality. She manages to capture the subtleties and carefully reveal the complexities and profundities of his thought. The guiding principle for her project is evident when she claims that

it is impossible to overstress the importance of the distance involved here between conceptions of sexuality as a monistic essence (Havelock Ellis et.al.) and the Freudian notion of it as a complex unity.⁶

She further stresses that Freud's theory of sexuality does not present a complete, absolute given or a "ready-made thing in itself which could then diverge." Rather, "normal" sexuality assumes its form and establishes itself only after it has "travelled over a long and tortuous path." Freud, claims Mitchell, did not place the stress on "the pool which released itself in different ways," but instead asked "from what sources was the pool formed." Apparently,

he realized that instead of a pool from which tributaries ran, the tributaries were needed in the first place to form the pool; these tributaries were diverse, could join each other, never reach their goal, find another goal, dry up, overflow and so get attached to something quite different.⁷

Notwithstanding either the intricacies or the developmental, progressive nature of Freud's thought, it nonetheless does constitute (as Mitchell stresses) a unity -- albeit a

⁶ Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women*. (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1975), p.18., italics mine.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.17.

complex unity. It is a system, which like any system is closed and circular and engulfs its participants. Once immersed, they must not only accept the initial premises but follow through to their logical conclusion. That Freud ultimately presents us with an invariant structure, which is focused on unity, with its own centres and origins is central to my argument, and should be kept in the forefront as we continue with Mitchell's exposition.

2.2 Oedipal Rex and the Phallus Prince

The study of neuroses led Freud to the notion of infantile sexuality and consequently to his theory of the nature of sexuality. Central to his explanation of sexuality is the Oedipus complex, "without which," as Mitchell points out, "none of this or anything really makes sense."¹ The central instrument and symbol of the Oedipus account is the phallus. As we shall see, the meaning that Freud ascribes to the phallus determines and circumscribes his overall theory of sexuality.

The Oedipal situation is such that it becomes the 'destiny' of little girls to be pushed into a state of passivity, initially toward their fathers and later towards their husbands. In the pre-Oedipal stage the little girl, who has become aware of the inferiority of her clitoris relative to the penis, gives up her mother as primary love object.

¹ *Ibid.*, p.26.

Throughout the prior oral, anal, phallic, and latent stages, the boy and girl are both active seekers of pleasure. In fact, the 'development of femininity' requires that the girl be ignorant of her vagina in the phallic stage and maintain clitoral activity. The subsequent suppression of this activity and the virtual denial of the clitoris then sets her on the path to femininity. Mother is abandoned as a love object for several reasons. She is viewed not only as 'all-responsible', but as 'castrated' and thus only serves to remind the little girl of "the wound to her narcissism." She now realizes that her "little penis" is inferior and ineffectual when it comes to possessing mother. She thus renounces her clitoris and the masturbatory pleasure it provided. In doing so, she "gives up a part of her active aims." The clitoris and the activity it implied is suppressed just enough so that "the new dominance of passive aims will help a transition from the active wanting of her mother to the passive aim of wanting to be wanted by her father."

Mitchell stresses that it is not a biological or chemical transition but primarily "a psychological shift to the 'destiny' of wifhood and maternity." Becoming a lady "involves a transition from the pre-Oedipal dominance of the active clitoris to the pubescent and adult dominance of the vagina to which the re-awakened clitoris conveys its sensitivity." Certainly, the "coming to be of the passive aims for the

² *Ibid.*, pp.106-109.

furtherance of femininity" is no simple business. As Freud often emphasized, it is a very "tricky process."¹⁰

However, it seems unlikely that Freud meant 'process' in its original literal meaning which stressed the randomness of events rather than a progressive, linked chain of occurrences. Although its complexity can make it appear rather precarious, Freud's theory of sexuality nonetheless seems far more characterized by an inescapable determinism than it does by chance or randomness. In as much as Freud admits that the 'tributaries' (desires, drives) that form the 'pool' (sexuality) are diverse, it seems rather unlikely that they are capricious or willful. Those which might "find another goal", and thus constitute another 'pool', likely represent only the aberrations and mutations of the system which somehow escape the dominant flow and trickle off in an unexpected direction.

From the initial acceptance of Freud's 'explanation' of the coming to be of feminine sexuality, one seems to be led to certain inevitable conclusions.¹¹ A conclusion that perhaps does not bode well for feminism is Mitchell's ultimate claim that civilization or human culture is *intrinsically* patriarchal. For the moment let us examine how Mitchell

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Obviously, Mitchell's account of the "making of a lady" includes an account of masculinity, certain aspects of which will be mentioned later in this chapter. I have related (in abridged fashion) only what is most necessary to my argument. For a thorough and detailed analysis of both see Part One of *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*.

arrived at such a position.

In order to relate the male and female sexual identities to the patriarchal structures of society, Mitchell incorporates with Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex, theories on the 'development' of the ego and kinship as articulated by Jacques Lacan and Claude Lévi-Strauss respectively.

2.3 Omissions/Distortions

Juliet Mitchell ends her discussion on Lacan by admitting that her account of his theory was not only "abbreviated" and "condensed", but that she "left out...what really amounts to the whole framework and thrust of [Lacan's] theory: the importance of language."¹² As Mitchell is well aware this is not an innocuous omission but a distortion of Lacan. I raise the issue because its importance extends beyond Mitchell's text as the 'importance of language' marks one of the most profound disjunctions between the Anglo-American and Franco psycho-analytic discourses. Moreover, within her analysis the 'omission' leads Mitchell to conceptions of the Oedipal conflict, the phallus, and ego development that might very well be challenged by a re-reading of Lacan's re-reading of Freud.* I shall attempt to offer an understanding of Mitchell's reading of Lacan showing where it leads her in order to lay the ground for an alternative reading of Lacan in Chapter Four of this work.

¹² Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, pp.397-398.

Symbols in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him 'par l'os et par la chair'; so total that they bring to his birth along with the gifts of the stars, if not with the gifts of the fairy spirits, the *design of his destiny*; so total that they give the words which will make him faithful or renegade, the law of the acts which will follow him right to the very place where he is not yet and beyond his death itself.¹³

Immediately following Lacan's citation Mitchell comments that

Whatever the child does, whatever the specific accidents of its individual history, all take place within the larger framework of this human order. It is within the Freudian 'unconscious' that the laws of this order speak...the unconscious is -- where id is, there must ego come to be.¹⁴

Contingency appears to be a remote possibility in the human order thus depicted. In Mitchell's account, if the unconscious could assume a first person voice it might take on God-like speech: "I am what I am -- what id is and where ego must come to be," -- the divine unity, so to speak.

Mitchell seems justified in interpreting Lacan's 'design of destiny' as resolute given that he likens it to the fixed patterns of the astral universe -- the external network of structure, form, and difference constituted by the stars. Such is the character of the human structure into which males enter and are thus engendered. In this human order, instead of the star, the primary form and symbol of differ-

¹³ Jacques Lacan, "The Function of Language in Psycho-Analysis", cited in *Ibid.*, p.391., italics mine except for *is*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

ence is the phallus. By identifying with this primary symbol males are capable of entering and assuring themselves of a place within the structure. Females then are also engendered by the symbolic phallic order; however, the 'castrated little penis' does not measure up to the requirements for identity or membership. Rather it (the clitoris) represents a lack or an absence that thus constitutes femininity as "un pas tout", to use Lacan's term. If the phallus is the symbol of difference in male and female ego development, then 'castrated' females must make a 'negative entry' into the symbolic order.

Mitchell makes clear that "the phallus is not identical with the actual penis, for it is what it signifies that is important" and the "signifying role is a *major* one."¹⁵ While the phallus for Mitchell is not 'identical' with the penis and she recognizes its central significance as 'signifier' she nonetheless seems compelled to inscribe it with more corporeal than imaginary meaning. As we shall see this may be the outcome of her failure to confront the centrality of language in Lacanian thought. It may well be the case that Mitchell needs Lacan for her argument, but does not wish to fully acknowledge his re-reading of Freud because she wants Freud on her own terms.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.396-397., italics mine.

2.4 Past Imperfect and Future Perfect: Tensions/Tenses

Freud realized that the Oedipus complex was with good reason the cornerstone of psycho-analysis -- its overcoming was the single most momentous sign of human culture.¹⁶

The reference to grammatical tenses in the subtitle is meant to suggest a possible framework⁹ for understanding Freud and later Lacan, as well as the role of contingency. Mitchell takes Freud at his word in seeing the overcoming of the Oedipus complex as a "momentous sign of human culture." As I shall attempt to demonstrate, the 'momentous' moment of overcoming for Freud/Mitchell seems utterly predictable save a few deviant cases. Knowing what should and what will likely be seems like an imposition of the future perfect tense of post-Oedipal time over the past imperfect tense/tension of pre-Oedipal time.

The Oedipal conflict is considered to be the cornerstone of psychoanalysis for two reasons. First, resolving or overcoming the conflict marks a movement into civilization, "the instigatory moment for the individual of human culture". Second, the twofold resolution of the complex "marks the psychological distinction between the sexes."¹⁷ Intimately tied to the Oedipal drama is the Freudian notion of the castration complex which brings us back to our earlier discussion of the central instrument/symbol of the entire schema; the penis/phallus.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.73.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.65,74.

Penis/phallus would seem an appropriate term because although the castration complex extends itself symbolically, its roots and dynamics are unquestionably corporeal for both sexes.

It is easy to observe that little girls fully share their brother's opinion [of the penis]. They develop a great interest in that part of the boy's body. But this interest promptly falls under the sway of envy. They feel themselves unfairly treated. They make attempts to micturate in the posture that is made possible for boys by their possessing a big penis; and when a girl declares that 'she would rather be a boy', we know what deficiency her wish is intended to put right.¹⁸

The castration complex for the girl then is marked by knowledge of her 'deficiency' and inferiority; the realization that her clitoris is not and never will be a 'big penis'. She possesses an 'actual' symbol of castration and this is the mark of her femininity. In Freud's words, "at this stage the contrast between the sexes is not stated in terms of 'male' or 'female' but of 'possessing a penis' or 'castrated'.¹⁹

As the possessor of a penis the boy's castration complex is of a different character. Seeing the girl's genitals, the boy, realizing that she has no penis, fears for the loss of his own. The sense of danger ensues from the boy's Oedipal desire for his mother which he must repress lest he should suffer castration at the hands of his jealous father;

¹⁸ Freud, "The Sexual Theories of Children" (1908), cited in *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

¹⁹ Freud, "An Autobiographical Study" (1925), cited in *Ibid.*, p. 87.

as well as from other direct threats of castration intended to curb his infantile masturbatory pleasures.

In his 1924 paper "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex", Freud claims that the primary cause of dissolution (for boys) is the fear that comes with the *realization* of castration; which is only acquired, despite previous punitive threats, with "the sight of female genitals."²⁰ Evidence of the girl's absent penis finally prompts the 'normal' boy to symbolically accept the possibility of his own castration, and thus curb his Oedipal tendencies. As Mitchell informs us, "acceptance of the possibility of castration is the boy's path to normal manhood" and "the reaction to the idea of it [castration], comes to be the crucial dividing line between the sexes."²¹

What then of the girl's path to 'normal' womanhood? Earlier in this chapter I outlined the path to 'becoming a lady' and we saw that upon recognizing her own castration the little girl renounces her clitoris and the activity it implies. This recognition marks her "entry to girlhood, just as the acceptance of the threat and deference to the father...is the boy's debt to his future manhood."²²

The girl's pre-Oedipal attachment to her mother as primary love object shifts to sexual desire for her father (wanting to be wanted by him). The father remains the boy's

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.88.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp.86-87.

²² *Ibid.*, p.96.

rival, while under normal circumstances, he must become the girl's 'loved one' because with her own 'self-love' shattered by her 'lack', and hostility towards her likewise 'castrated mother, little choice remains but to exploit her "passive instinctual impulses ... the passive aims of her sexual drive" and "thus she becomes a little woman. This transference from mother to father is the girl's 'positive' Oedipus complex' and, as it is the first step on her path to womanhood, there is no need for her to leave it."²³ The girl's acceptance, in opposition to the boy's fear of castration is intimately bound to their divergent destinies. For as Mitchell makes explicit, "where the castration complex *shatters* the boy's Oedipus complex, it *inaugurates* the girl's, as in despair and despite she turns from the mother to the father."²⁴

2.5 Narcissism -- Mothers, Others, and Mirrors

Unlike the girl, the boy cannot safely linger in the Oedipal phase because as 'possessor of the penis' he might exercise his potency and thus risk losing it. Hence, in order to preserve his 'power' for the future he must redirect its desires. The proper resolution of the Oedipus complex ensures the boy's position as rightful heir of the patriarchal law as it is symbolized by the phallus.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp.96-97.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.99.

According to Mitchell, Freud had numerous reasons "for the value attached to the phallus" but her concern is primarily with "the effect of that value." The value of the phallus pertains to "its ownership" which is "crucial to the nature of the ego being formed, or rather its loss would be an immense blow for the narcissistic ego."²⁵

The presence or absence of the phallus for Freud is a crucial determinant of ego formation. The primacy of the concept of castration for Freud is due to his view that it constitutes the link between pre-Oedipal narcissism characterized by auto-eroticism and the object-love of the Oedipus conflict. The phallus acts as a bridge.

The threat to the phallus is ... the greatest threat to the ego's narcissism and ... to the child's object-relations. Fear of castration is thus both pre-Oedipal and the cause of the end of the Oedipus complex.²⁶

Mitchell claims to interpret Freud's notion of narcissism "within a schema" of Lacanian theory. Freud locates the origins of ego formation in the child's narcissistic stage. The infant is in a state of intra-subjectivity and like the mythical Narcissus he is absorbed in self-fascination. However, he initially experiences himself as disjointed parts and functions. As it attempts to distinguish itself from the world the infant seeks itself in others. The earliest development of the self (I, ego, subject) occurs with the baby's sense of awareness of the mother's facial expressions

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.88.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.83.

which respond to or 'mirror' the child's activities. The sense of self is thus first experienced as alienated, because the child can only see itself "in another, mother, or mirror." This "original identification of the ego" is therefore "an imaginary construct based not on a true recognition but a mis-recognition."²⁷ In order to establish his subjectivity the baby must regain the self back from the 'other', 'mother', or 'mirror' which then creates a tension between the mother/other and the baby, as well as between the 'I' as subject and the 'me' as object. While the initial relation of "the self to itself" is imagined there is nonetheless an authentic notion of identity (despite its imaginary status). In "On Narcissism" Freud claimed that "a *unity* comparable to the ego cannot exist in the individual from the start; the ego has to be developed."²⁸ The initial identification of the ego occurs in the 'mirror stage' and subsequently develops into the fully-formed integral subject.

Freud's concept of ego development could also be seen as a 'history of subjectivity'. Each stage can be seen as a necessary rite of passage towards the integral ego. As we saw earlier, the resolution of the Oedipus complex differs for boys and girls, thus setting them on distinct paths of ego development.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.40-41.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.40., (*italics mine*).

Following Freud, Mitchell claims that the ego forms itself by identifying 'love-objects' which it either abandons or incorporates into the developing self by setting the objects inside of itself. Let us look at the infant's most obvious love-objects -- the mother and father, at the moment of the Oedipal resolution. As we saw, the boy's Oedipal complex is shattered when he 'truly' fears castration which leads him to a "new type of identification" whereby he relinquishes his mother as love-object and identifies with his father. At this point, Freud introduces the notion of the 'superego' which acts as an 'authority' or 'conscience' that "stipulates that the boy must be like his father, but not too like him" lest he should wish to replace the father. Fear of the "threatening father" comes to be replaced by "fear of the superego" which is typified by a more general "moral anxiety". The superego while "retaining the character of the father...threatens its own ego, from which it in part arose."²⁹

The little girl also abandons her mother as love-object but she replaces her with the father whom she internalizes as a love-object as opposed to a "powerful and punitive" threat. This difference leads Freud to conclude that the girl's superego "with all that implies for authority, conscience, sublimation...will, of necessity be weaker."³⁰

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.71,82-83,88-99.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.99., (italics mine).

Similarly the unity 'comparable to the ego' necessarily and 'normally' develops if it passes correctly from pre-Oedipal narcissism to the Oedipal conflict and so forth. Mitchell's exposition of Freud has made sufficiently clear, that the 'design of destiny' for both boys and girls is invariant to the extent that its progressive development and continuity constitutes a norm. Even within a specific schema such as the Oedipal conflict the symbols at play seem inscribed with unalterable meaning. Mitchell subscribes to Lacan's view that the phallus plays a major signifying role in the relationship between the three terms of mother, child, and phallus.¹¹ The mother-child relationship at most levels seems "mediated by an absence or lack." The child may want to be the phallus for his mother but he then confronts the reality that his father already occupies the spot physically as well as symbolically. The little boy thus "acknowledges the situation and learns that one day he, too, will accede to the father's function."¹²

Proceeding from her acknowledgement that she has omitted the "thrust" of Lacan's theory (the importance of language), Mitchell offers as reason her wish to select from Lacan only the theme "of the phallus for the institution of civilization, and the fundamental part played by *difference* in the

¹¹ The distinction between speaking in terms of 'signifier/signified' and 'meaning/representation' will be explained in Chapter Four. Suffice it to say for now that the signifier is something capable of bestowing meaning; that which has been inscribed by meaning is the signified.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.397.

formation of the human subject."³³

At first reading this seems like a plausible motive and Mitchell appears to have been successful in weaving Lacan into her Freudian framework. Upon closer reading of Lacan, however, one discovers that Mitchell's interpretations of some key Freudian concepts may be rendered entirely problematic by Lacan. Of particular concern is her use of Lacan to sustain the notion of 'ego development', which cannot be sustained because Lacan attempts to rupture the ego, and this would deny the continuity of development. Lacan may have a notion of the 'disseminated subject', and this is far from the formed ego that Mitchell constructs. These issues will be raised in fuller form in the discussion of Lacan and the 'French Feminists' in the fourth and final chapter. Let us now return to Mitchell's discussion, particularly to her incorporation of Claude Levi-Strauss.

2.6 Phallic Heritage/Patriarchal Law

"History," claims Mitchell, "starts with the Oedipus complex, or rather with its overcoming and the inauguration of structured language that accompanies it; that is to say it starts with patriarchal civilization."³⁴ In order to substantiate her position that human culture is inherently patriarchal, Mitchell relies on the rule of exogamy and incest taboo elaborated by Levi-Strauss. She does not, and

³³ *Ibid.*, p.398.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.110.

cannot, however, altogether abandon Marcuse's argument of basic and surplus repression.³⁵ Instead, she sets it aside and re-introduces it in an altered form later in the argument when attempting to explain the persistence of patriarchy (and its relation to capitalism), and the possibilities for moving beyond it. For Marcuse, "patriarchy becomes domination only insofar as it takes the form of class society" and "surplus repression is well under way in all toil-free civilizations." She contends "that human culture has always been patriarchal. The transition from primate to human society, from nature to culture is essentially an imposition of incest taboos and exogamy rules on pre-cultural hominid families."³⁶

Levi-Strauss shows that the 'biological' family of mother, father, and child is not what distinguishes human kinship structures.³⁷ The original biological family was (and must be) transformed for society to be instituted.

The universal and primordial law is that which regulates marriage relationships and its pivotal expression is the prohibition on incest. This prohibition forces one family to give up one of

³⁵ In Chapter Three I give a full summary of Marcuse's argument. Please see pages for his understanding of the causes of human civilization.

³⁶ Gad Horowitz, *Repression: Basic and Surplus Repression In Psycho-Analytic Theory -- Freud, Reich, and Marcuse*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), pp.117, 122-123.

³⁷ It seems astounding that Mitchell is uncritically subscribing to Levi-Strauss's argument here. The biological family really only consists of mother and her children since paternity is always questionable. We will for the sake of the discussion carry on with Levi-Strauss's version of it as mother, father, and child.

its members. to another family. The act of exchange holds a society together: the rules of kinship (like those of language to which they are near-allied) *are* the society. Whatever the nature of the society -- patriarchal, matrilineal, patrilineal...it is always men who exchange women. Women thus become the equivalent of a sign which is being communicated."¹⁸

The Oedipal girl enters human culture by "internalizing the Law of 'structured language' which imposes the acceptance of 'difference' (ie. individuation and the incest taboo)." "What is required is the *simultaneous* acceptance of the 'difference' between phallic and castrated, and the internalization of the mother's identity as castrated. The father, who enforced the separation from the mother, and therefore "the break with the pre-cultural 'dual-unity' situation", is seen as the incarnation of the Law. Ego development apparently occurs in one long process, there being "no difference between the first difference (individuation, separation from the mother) and the second difference (acceptance of castration, of normal femininity)."¹⁹

According to Mitchell the initiation into the Law of Difference is entirely enacted by the father, regardless of the cultural circumstances. Given that she has agreed to the universal authority of the phallus as a symbol for form, structure, and action, her position cannot be otherwise. At this point Mitchell seems to be in a quandary. She endorses rational collective action for women, but the Freudian

¹⁸ Mitchell, *Psycho-Analysis and Feminism*., pp.370-371.

¹⁹ Horowitz, *Repression*., p.121.

explanatory framework as she interprets it, dictates that male domination is both a psychic reality and a cultural necessity. It would seem that Freudian boundaries are more rigid than Mitchell cares to admit.

The crucial question, then, is whether the psychic reality and cultural necessity of female subordination and male dominance can be transcended. Mitchell asserts that, despite the persistence of patriarchy, male dominance is no longer necessary to culture. Her neo-Marxist analysis concludes that our advanced capitalist society no longer "needs" its "discontents" -- be they alienated labor or female subordination. Patriarchal culture has apparently become redundant.

Under capitalism, just as the economic mode of production contains its own contradiction, so too, does the ideological mode of reproduction. The social conditions of work under capitalism potentially contain the overthrow of the exploitative conditions into which they are harnessed and it is these *same* social conditions of work that make potentially redundant the laws of patriarchal culture.⁴⁰

Mitchell is nonetheless careful to distinguish between the plight of women and that of the working class: the solution for one cannot simply be extended to the other. Despite the complexities of capitalism, Mitchell would hold that the relation between capitalism and the working class is more straightforward than that between patriarchy and women. For Mitchell, human culture is defined as "the controlled exchange of women," and it is "reproduced in the

⁴⁰ Mitchell, *Psycho-Analysis and Feminism*, p.412.

patriarchal ideology of every form of society."⁴¹ Though connected to class conflict, patriarchal ideology is prior to and more embedded in society than are capitalist values. Whereas the laws of capitalism remain at the surface of social intercourse, "the patriarchal law speaks to and through each person in his *unconscious*, the reproduction of the ideology of human society is thus assured in the acquisition of the law by each individual."

Mitchell attributes a great deal of explanatory power to the unconscious. She stresses that women do not simply bear witness to patriarchy in the powerful ideology of their pro-creative roles, but "*above all* in the very psychology of femininity."⁴² There would seem to be no escaping it. While women may become enlightened as to the "truth" of themselves, it remains doubtful that they can somehow alter the psychological inheritance that remains their destiny and burden.

The power of the unconscious seems to render the feminist psychic reality insurmountable. In Mitchell's schema, abolishing patriarchy requires a prior transformation of the passive feminine psyche. Although Mitchell claimed earlier that the cultural necessity of male dominance no longer

⁴¹ Gutmann, "Freud versus Feminism", p.212. The contention that women have always been the "objects of social exchange" is contested by many feminists. A challenge to Mitchell can be found in *Women, Culture, and Society*, eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo & Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974)

⁴² Mitchell, *Psycho-Analysis and Feminism.*, p.413.

existed, we are not to assume that we are to remain passive witnesses to its withering away. Quite the contrary. Patriarchs, like capitalists, will ensure their superiority for the sake of self-interest even when the imposition has been rendered superfluous. Because there is no assurance that the ailing patriarchs will make it to their deathbed, it is the duty of feminists to bring the deathbed to the patriarchs. In Mitchell's words,

patriarchal ideology, while it poses as the ultimate rationalization, is, in fact, in the slow death throes of its own irrationality; in this it is like the capitalist economy itself. But in both cases only a *political* struggle will bring their surcease. Neither can die a natural death.⁴³

It is a peculiar dilemma, at several levels. At the level of political advocacy we are to understand woman as the dynamic agent of radical political action. Yet thus far Mitchell has led us to see woman as a passive object of exchange who at best might be capable of reaction. Historical description and political prescription remain incongruous. Moreover, there appears to be an ontological tension underlying Mitchell's descriptive and prescriptive framework which further vitiates its coherence. Mitchell tries to simultaneously occupy two levels of ground: one on which to situate patriarchy and political advocacy, and the other on which to locate the significance of the unconscious. Her intent is to reconcile a materialist understanding of patriarchy with a Lacanian reading of the unconscious as essen-

⁴³ *Ibid.*

tially unknowable territory. The problem is the incommensurability of two distinct ontological positions: that is, the ontological significance of the unconscious as read by Lacan mitigates against the very identification of a mode like patriarchy.

In *Basic and Surplus Repression* Gad Horowitz claims that Mitchell's "prescription [with regard to abolishing patriarchy] is too vague and confusing to be criticized."⁴⁴ I would modify this stance to say that the problem lies more with the incongruity between Mitchell's ontological/psychological and political ground than it does with the prescription itself.

As we shall see in the final chapter, there is a case to be made for seeing a 'double agenda' in Lacan's thought: that is both a 'fixing' and a 'slippage' of meaning. The latter necessarily imposes a sense of precariousness to the very categories of meaning that Lacan supposedly identifies, and consequently to the Lacanian project itself. Mitchell, I would suggest does not confront this aspect of Lacan and thus makes him partner to categories such as 'ego development' and 'patriarchy' for example, which seem incoherent in a fuller reading of Lacan. The confrontation with precariousness that Mitchell carefully avoids is central to the debate between Lacan and the 'French Feminists'. Moreover, it clearly marks a point of divergence between the Anglo-American and Franco feminist psychoanalytic debate.

⁴⁴ Horowitz, *Repression*, p.122.

2.7 Objects Relations -- Nancy Chodorow and the Reproduction of Gender

Before sisterhood, there was the knowledge -- transitory, fragmented, perhaps, but original and crucial -- of mother-and-daughterhood. This cathexis between mother and daughter -- essential, distorted, misused -- is the great unwritten story. Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored to give birth to the other. The materials are here for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement.

-Adrienne Rich

*Of Woman Born*⁴⁵

With Adrienne Rich's epigraph we return to the womb, and to the metaphor of the body as 'homeland'. The imagery of fusion and individuation, presence and absence is particularly poignant when speaking of the mother-child relation. As Rich also reminds us, our mother is to each of us our "native shore." Freud himself was seventy-four when his mother died, and at the time he wrote, "I was not allowed to die as long as she was alive, and now I may. Somehow the values of life have notably changed in the deeper layers."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976), pp.225-226.

⁴⁶ Freud, cited in Coppelia Kahn, "The Hand that Rocks the Cradle," *The (M)Other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, eds. Shirley N. Garner et. al. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p.80.

With her death came the final irrevocable separation between the mother and son which had, according to Freud, already occurred at another level many years before. Despite his idealized love for, and deep attachment to his mother, Freud understood that his masculine identity (as is the case for all men) depended on a dissociation from his mother at the Oedipal stage. As we already know, Freud sees this separation as also required of little girls in order that they establish their 'proper' feminine identity. What is at the heart of Freud's account, claims Adrienne Rich, is 'matrophobia'. That is "fear not of one's mother or of motherhood but of *becoming one's mother*" and thus, (particularly with regard to boys) of losing one's own gender identity. The "deep underlying pull" toward the mother is accompanied by a "dread that if one relaxes one's guard one will identify with her completely." Hence, matrophobia can be seen as "the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage, to become individuated and free."⁴⁷

In the Freudian schema the severance of the mother-child attachment is a requisite to the establishment of gender identity for both sexes. Hence, for Freud, the guiding metaphor is one of division and individuation. Feminists such as Rich and Dorothy Dinnerstein agree with Freud that such estrangement characterizes the mother-child relation, but do not concur (especially with regard to girls) with Freud's

⁴⁷ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, pp.235-236. She borrows the term 'matrophobia' from the poet Lynn Sukenick.

description of the disunion as a natural part of normal sexual development. Instead, they contend that the rupture, particularly between mother and daughter is forced by a patriarchal culture which decrees that women's energies (sensual, emotional, and so forth) are intended to flow towards men. As Rich contends, the patriarchal culture

makes it clear that mothers are not "worthy" of our profoundest love and loyalty. Women are made taboo to women -- not just sexually, but as comrades, cocreators, conspirators. In breaking this taboo, we are reuniting with our mothers; in reuniting with our mothers, we are breaking this taboo...The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy.**

In the true sense of the word, the tragedy occurs because of irreconcilable differences. The little girl learns that woman love cannot be reconciled to a patriarchal world wherein heterosexuality is 'compulsory' and therefore, competing for male affections is the expression of 'normal' sexuality.

Dinnerstein, like Freud, marks the transference of love from mother to father,* but in her view the shift is of a different character. In the sense of actual tragedy, the little girl is "doomed" to renounce her first and original love (mother/woman) and transfer her love to father/man. The love of a man, while necessary for a proper entry into patriarchal culture, always remains secondary to the first love, or mother/woman. Becoming a 'normal' female requires renunciation of what Dinnerstein sees as primordial 'gyn/

** *Ibid.*, pp.255 & 237.

affection'. In relinquishing to father/man love that originally belonged to mother/woman, the girl has in effect

cut herself off from a continuity with her own early feeling, for which she now mourns...[she feels] anger at a gratuitous betrayal of her oldest root in life, a betrayal for which she was responsible but of which he [man] (in the form of his original parental predecessor) was the instrument.⁴⁹

2.8 Symbolic Presence/Immediate Absence -- Immediate Presence/Symbolic Absence

In her work *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Nancy Chodorow offers a revision of Freud which challenges his view (shared by Rich and Dinnerstein) that a striking split between the mother and daughter occurs at the Oedipal stage. Chodorow stays within Freud's basic framework, but changes the emphases. She diminishes the importance of the Oedipal stage and identifies the pre-Oedipal time as crucial to the formation of gender identity. For both boys and girls relations to the mother (love object) dictate the character of sexual identity.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and The Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p.65.

⁵⁰ In psychoanalytic parlance, "objects" are people, aspects of people, or symbols of people. The kernel of "objects relations" theory is that understanding of self is constructed from relations with others/objects.

In keeping with Freud, Chodorow claims that masculine identity depends on individuation from the mother; but unlike Freud she sees feminine identity formed by a fusion with the mother. According to Chodorow, then, the girl never renounces the mother as primary love object and therefore is not "cut off from a continuity" that mother represents. Rather, Chodorow points to a problem of too much continuity between mother and daughter as compared to mother and son. Mothers treat sons more as separate beings than they do girls, who they tend to see as extensions of themselves. She locates the source of the problem in the female monopoly of child-rearing in most cultures. Mother is the primary caretaker, and while she encourages her son to distinguish himself from her and be autonomous, she identifies with her daughter to the extent that she creates an ambivalence in her about separation. Chodorow contends that

girls in our society have normally remained externally and internally in relationships with their pre-Oedipal mother and have been preoccupied with issues of separation, identification without merging, mitigation of dependency, freedom from ambivalence. Girls cannot and do not "reject" their mother and women in favor of their father and men.⁵¹

Father cannot replace mother, in Chodorow's view, because he simply does not present himself to the girl with the force that her mother does. He is not as physically present to the girl, nor does he invest himself (identity, fulfill-

⁵¹ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p.140.

ment) to the same degree. Therefore, even if father is the object of adoration and fantasy, "he is not the same primary, internal object as her mother and therefore cannot finally counteract his daughter's primary identification with and attachment to her mother."⁵²

The girl thus experiences herself as less differentiated from her mother than does the boy. Consequently, her female gender identity is threatened by separation while the male identity is threatened by intimacy and fusion with the mother. Therefore, repression of pre-Oedipal love for the mother is more intense in boys than in girls. The result in terms of ego formation is that ego boundaries in boys are sharply defined, while in girls are more flexible and fluid.

At the source of such divergent ego formation is women's 'mothering', which Chodorow claims

produces asymmetries in the relational experiences of girls and boys as they grow up, which account for crucial differences in feminine and masculine personality ... Women and men grow up with personalities affected by different boundary experiences and differently constructed and experienced inner-object worlds.⁵³

Identifying the primacy of the mother with respect to ego formation is not in itself innovative or distinct from Freud. The novelty of Chodorow's account (as well as Rich's and Dinnerstein's) is their insistence on the primacy of 'objects relations', and thus on central social relations such as mothering. In terms of ego formation this places

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.139-140.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.169.

the emphasis on "historical contingency rather than biological destiny."⁵⁴

By stressing the social relation between mother and child, Chodorow intends to diminish the importance of sexual-instinctual dynamics such as penis envy and castration anxiety as laid out by Freud. However, like Freud, she presents an integral pattern for male and female gender development. The "process of differentiation" may be different, but nevertheless, "the self in object-relations theory is constituted as a unity."⁵⁵

In Chodorow's view, the realization and formation of gender occurs in the child before the Oedipal complex through the relationship with the mother, and not primarily with the child's perception of anatomical differences. Gender formation for Chodorow may not depend on corporal differences (penis, lack of penis) but certainly are materialist in nature. That is, male and female genders diverge in formation because the material presence (physical, emotional, sensual) of the mother differs for each sex, as does the material presence of the father. Earlier we saw that girls do not, and cannot, according to Chodorow, reject their mother as primary love object. Later, however, Chodorow informs us that although the mother is not definitively rejected, the father is incorporated as a love object which

⁵⁴ Kahn, "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle", p.74.

⁵⁵ Shirley Nelson Garner et. al. Introduction to *The Mother Tongue*, p.21.

means that the girl remains "in a bisexual triangle throughout childhood and into puberty." Furthermore, girls may "retain an *internal* emotional triangle", but nonetheless, "they *usually* make a *sexual resolution* in favor of men and their father."⁶

On what grounds does Chodorow base her claims that the 'sexual resolution' usually favors men and the father? Given that she has diminished the importance of sexual instincts, and given her depiction of the mother-daughter relation as one of presence, fusion and fluidity, and the father-daughter relation as one of absence and differentiation, I would suggest that ~~ultimately~~ she cannot sustain the claim within the bounds of her materialist explanation. By materialist I refer to Chodorow's conception of the mother's corporeal/emotional presence versus the father's corporeal/emotional absence. Within this context, the only explanation for a resolution in favor of the father and men would be that they possess a certain symbolic power or presence which the mother lacks. The equation might be seen as follows: mother/woman = immediate presence/symbolic absence; father/man = symbolic presence/immediate absence.

Chodorow invokes the embodied presence of the pre-Oedipal mother and the disembodied absence of the pre-Oedipal father; and then presents a sexual resolution that seems incoherent because it implies substantial power for this absent father. In her revision of Freud, Chodorow takes

⁶ Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering.*, p.140.

into account the role of the anatomical penis but not that of the symbolic phallus. The daughter, it would seem, is compelled towards and justifies a heterosexual resolution when she comes to perceive and understand the symbolic phallic law which governs her life, despite her father's immediate absence.

In the discussion of sexuality to follow in Chapter Four, we shall see that, in contradistinction to American feminist revisionists who invoke the mother's presence, French psycho-analytic feminists focus on her absence in a world overshadowed by phallic principles.

Chapter III

INSCRIPTION OF THE BODY

Sexuality was far more of a positive product of power than power was ever repression of sexuality...it is precisely these positive mechanisms that need to be investigated, and here one must free oneself of the juridical schematism of all previous characterizations of the nature of power.¹

Power can indeed be a repressive force. But the notion of repression is insidious. It implies the presence of an agency and/or instrument, as well as the existence of a "living, voluble" being that power has supposedly "come to repress and reduce to silence."² With regard to sexuality it presupposes a true inner nature that constitutes us as sexual beings, waiting to be revealed. By this account liberation and revelation coincide. As we saw in Chapter One, feminist theory then becomes the systematic chipping away at the shackles of power that have obscured and deformed the authentic sexuality that lies within us.

¹ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp.120-121.

² *Ibid.*, pp.118-119.

One of the central concepts that sustains this schema is power as a repressive, prohibitive force. Such a limited meaning does not, however, account for the fecundity of power. A brief examination of a traditional, albeit modern, understanding of power will allow us to subsequently highlight the characteristics of non-repressive power.

3.1 Economies of Repression

Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* is of particular interest to this discussion because his account of sexuality provides a thorough exposition of the repressive theory of power. His work, in this respect, is the theoretical foundation of much of the anglo-american feminism discussed in Chapter One.

Marcuse examines what he sees as the dilemma of Western civilization. He ultimately argues that civilization is on a path of self-destruction and that in order to avoid the cataclysm man must transcend civilization in its exclusive preoccupation with the 'performance' or 'reality' principle.¹ Marcuse sees Eros as the "energy of life" or the "life instinct." At the outset he claims that "uncontrolled Eros" is just as fatal as its deathly counterpart, the death instinct or Thanatos. Eros is a destructive force because

¹ The notion of 'performance principle' is defined and discussed further on in this chapter.

it is desire which in order to be fulfilled must necessarily expend itself. Hence in a pure animalistic state of nature humans could not preserve themselves as individuals or as a species because such life, literally lived to its fullest, would be self-destructive. Consequently, in order to have a history, humans must somehow control Eros so that it is not perpetually destroying that which it creates. Marcuse acknowledges Freud's insight that "the history of man is the history of his repression."⁴ The repression or constraint of Eros makes culture possible. Civilization or culture is based on a controlling or ordering principle which serves to humanize men and women -- moving them from animal to civilized existence. Marcuse identifies this capacity to repress Eros as "the most irrefutable indictment of Western civilization -- and at the same time the most unshakeable defense of this civilization."⁵

Both Marcuse's condemnation and his defense are based on the distinction he makes between "basic" and "surplus" repression, and how they relate to the Freudian notions of the "pleasure principle" and the "reality principle." Marcuse favours the "humanization" of mankind and this requires basic repression which entails modifying the instincts to the extent that the human race can self-perpetuate. In Freudian terms, this involves moving from a world ordered by

⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p.11.

⁵ *Ibid.*

the pleasure principle where all energies are devoted to "immediate satisfaction, pleasure, joy (play), receptiveness, and absence of repression" to one ordered by the reality principle where there is "delayed satisfaction, restraint of pleasure, toil (work), productiveness, and security."⁶

The reality principle or basic repression requires that humans regiment their instincts to be less "pleasure-seeking" and more "pain-accepting". In this context, pain is associated with work which is required of humanized individuals in order that their needs are fulfilled. What makes the pain tolerable is the knowledge that 'pre-cultural' or 'pre-societal' humans lived in scarcity, and therefore, becoming civilized ensures a distribution so that at least minimum needs are met. These types of basic controls, says Marcuse, are "indispensable for civilized human association." Additional controls that have nothing in common with the basic goal of civilization (perpetuation of the species and culture) but that are specific interests of domination, Marcuse terms "surplus repression." Surplus repression, whether exercised by an individual, a group, gender, or an institution, no longer serves the interests of the civilization, but rather enhances a privileged position.⁷

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.34-37.

According to Marcuse, those responsible for surplus repression belong to the class of patriarchal capitalists who impose a certain technical rationality upon the world. In a society characterized by surplus repression, workers no longer fulfill their needs or exercise their faculties. They are alienated individuals.

Libido (Eros) is diverted for socially useful performances in which the individual works for himself only in so far as he works for the apparatus, engaged in activities that mostly do not coincide with his own faculties and desires.¹

A rational routine is imposed on the society which diverts Eros away from its many objects of desire and channels it towards the sole end of productivity. The routine imposed ensures that the maximum amount of energy is saved for work, and a minimal amount is expended seeking pleasures.

Marcuse identifies this transformation of the individual from a pleasure-seeker to an instrument of labour as the "de-erotization" of the body. Only sexual activity that is socially useful or enhances productivity and profit is deemed normal and good. Conversely, sex which is not socially useful and which detracts from work is defined as abnormal and perverse. Thus the "libido becomes concentrated in part of the body, leaving the rest free for work."² More specifically, this involves the assertion and enforcement of "genital primacy," which dictates that heterosexual, penis-in-vagina, procreative intercourse is superior to pre-

¹ *Ibid.*, p.45.

² *Ibid.*, p.48.

genital, polymorphous, oral, anal, non-procreative sex. In Marcuse's view,

the manifestations of pleasure for its own sake must appear as *fleurs du mal*. Against a society which employs sexuality as means for a useful end, the perversions uphold sexuality as an end in itself, they thus place themselves outside the dominion of the performance principle and challenge its very foundation.¹⁰

According to Marcuse, we live in a 'super-genital' society where 'pre-genital' or polymorphous pleasures are restricted and sublimated to such a ~~degree that~~ they are condoned only as foreplay or forepleasure to 'normal' intercourse.¹¹

The surplus repression of desires, argues Marcuse, leads to frustrations, which in turn lead to destructive acts of aggression by those who are suppressed: Nevertheless, it is "socially channelled destructiveness" in a system that allows certain transgressions to occur, because quite simply, it can afford them. Despite this, the situation becomes increasingly volatile in direct proportion to the growth of the technological apparatus.

Technological progress requires work (cultural activity) that is increasingly inhuman, artificial, a set of prosthetic devices which grate against humanity's delicate animal nature.¹²

Marcuse argues that the 'delicate nature' can only be tampered with so long before it explodes. To avoid this cataclysm he proposes the "re-erotization" of society.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.50.

¹¹ Horowitz, *Repression.*, p.77.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.156.

No longer used as a full-time instrument of labor, the body would be resexualized. The regression involved in this spread of libido would first manifest itself in a reactivation of all erotogenic zones, and consequently in a resurgence of pregenital polymorphous sexuality, and in a decline of genital primacy. The body in its entirety would become an object of cathexis, a thing to be enjoyed -- an instrument of pleasure.¹³

In dissolving surplus repression, Marcuse is not proposing the dissolution of basic repression or work. Rather, work, being the basis of societal organization becomes an "erotic activity" within the new order. One would witness the end of alienation of labour and the beginning of "sensuousness, play and song ... the opposition between man and nature, subject and object, is overcome. Being is experienced as gratification which unites man and nature so that the fulfillment of man is at the same time the fulfillment, without violence, of nature."¹⁴

¹³ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p.201.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.166.

One is to presume that the opposition between man and woman would also dissolve. There is an extensive feminist literature on androgynous relations which are purported to be 'pure' and 'power-free'. Although it is not of direct concern to us here, I should note that Marcuse does not explore how basic repression and hence civilization and individuation could still exist in this primarily narcissistic realm. As Fromm comments, it would seem to be "a society which experiences the universe as an uninterrupted continuum, in which the ego lacks any basis on which to grasp itself as a separate and unique entity. As ego dissolves in the all pervasive unity brought about by the id, the autonomy and freedom so cherished by Marcuse would disappear too." (Cited in Horowitz, *Repression*, p.202.)

Repression is a channeling away from corporal desires. The essence or energy of Desires or Eros, however, remains constant and is not in itself transformed; it is only forced to flow down a new path. The solution for Marcuse therefore lies in liberation from our history of repression.

Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* has been considered "supreme fiction in its most elaborate and entangled form."¹⁵ The reasons for seeing Marcuse's work as "great fiction" are similar to those that draw Daly and Hartsock's formulations into the same category. Similar to theirs, Marcuse's metaphysical alignment privileges a notion of a centre of pure origins and, moreover, assumes a transparent meaning for these origins.

¹⁵ Charles M. Holmes, "Herbert Marcuse and The Supreme Fiction," *Humanities In Society*. Vol.2, No.3 (Summer 1979), p.303.

The assertion even of a *fiction* of the unity of women and the globality of patriarchy has created a space for [women] from which to interpret as well as to speak. Our task is to deconstruct, to undo our own meanings and categories ... so as not to close the question of woman and discourse around new certainties and absolutes.¹⁶

To consider the 'unity of woman' and the 'globality of patriarchy' a fiction is to claim, as some feminists have, that "there is no 'outside' in the material and discursive system that structures our subjectivity," and that what is essential is a "suspension of belief in fixed identities of the sexual, cultural, and political kind."¹⁷ If there is no 'outside' it becomes impossible to locate ground on which to posit a centre or origin which is somehow outside the workings of power which characterize the material and discursive system. Moreover, it is misleading to speak of a 'subjectivity', for without an external point of reference there cannot be a distinct internal point that is identifiable as the authentic core of a subject.

¹⁶ Biddy Martin, "Feminism, Criticism, and Foucault," *New German Critique*. No.27 (Fall 1982), p.16.

¹⁷ Rosi Braidotti, "Ethics revisited: Women and/in Philosophy," in *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory*. eds. Carole Pateman & Elizabeth Gross (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986), p.54.

Much is at stake in rejecting, with the repressive model of power, the notion of female sexuality as pure, constant, and retrievable. With Michel Foucault as a guide, I shall attempt to further articulate the features of sexuality previously discussed, which are rendered problematic by a rejection of the view of power as repression. In short, I shall attempt to "undo our own meanings and categories" with a view to keeping the question of woman open.

3.2 Economies of Production

Foucault's own starting point for his investigation and subsequent retheorization of power is different from those of traditional analyses of power. Rather than attempting a "deduction of power", starting from global forms of power (class, institutions) and working down to the base, Foucault recommends an "ascending analysis" of power starting from "infinitesimal mechanisms, which each have their own history, their own trajectory."¹⁸

Foucault proposes that power be examined at the locus where it links itself to knowledge as this is the site of its most basic relations. The workings of power may be revealed by tracking the establishment and transformation of systems of knowledge or 'truth'. Thus Foucault claimed that the fundamental concern in all his work was "the effects of

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.99.

power and the production of 'truth.'¹⁹

When Foucault spoke of the "interweaving of effects of power and knowledge" he recognized their symbiotic relationship. According to Foucault, "we are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth."²⁰ Thus Foucault establishes the *productive* side of power, its capacity not only to repress, but to create. He does not entirely dispense with the notion of repressive power. He acknowledges that there is still juridical power being exercised and even admits that he has had "trouble in freeing [himself] of it." Nevertheless, he is insistent that

what makes power hold good, what makes it acceptable, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse ... a productive network ... much more than a negative instance.²¹

Foucault's claim is radical. At the heart of his project is a challenge to certain well-entrenched categories of the Western metaphysical tradition. Of concern to us here is the threat his formulation poses to the two fundamental notions of teleology and ontology: the systems of thought evoking a pure, definable origin and rational development to

¹⁹ Foucault, "Non au sexe roi," interview in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, March 12, 1977, p.105. Cited in Leslie Paul Thiele, "Foucault's Triple Murder and the Modern Development of Power," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*. Vol.XIX No.2 (June 1986). p.245.

²⁰ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, pp.109, 93.

²¹ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p.119.

human existence, and the transcendental nature of the human subject.

Traditional Western metaphysics posits a rational teleology with an immutable origin. If the meaning that issues from the source is not always transparent, there is nonetheless the assumption that it exists and can be 'unconcealed'. In contrast to this position, Foucault asserts that

we must not imagine that the world turns toward us a legible face which we would have only to decipher; the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which predisposes the world in our favor.²²

For Foucault then, institutions and practices are not constructed upon the knowledge permanently engraved in 'legible faces' but rather on masks that assume the faces of 'truth'. Masks are continuously being inter-changed and new ones created. The dynamic is characterized not by the concealment or destruction of pure knowledge or meanings, but rather, by the renewed creation of truths and origins. Instead of an authentic source of meaning hidden and threatened by thanatic forces, Foucault points to creative forces which by 'interweaving' with knowledge produce numerous myths of origin. Like Daly and Marcuse, Foucault is engaged in revelation. However, as opposed to the former's teleologies, Foucault is self-consciously constructing parodies.

²² Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," cited in William E. Connolly, "Taylor, Foucault, and Otherness," *Political Theory*. Vol.13 No.3 (August 1985), p.366.

The myth disguised as truth is, according to Foucault, an "external visage" which is a manifestation of power "where it is in direct and immediate relationship with that which we can provisionally call its object, its target, its field of application ... where it installs itself and produces its real effects."²³ His objective is not to provide counter-truths or even counter-myths, but to disturb and unsettle discourses which have assumed the cloak of truth which inexorably reveals itself.

There is no doubt that Foucault is engaged in a struggle, an "insurrection of knowledges against institutions and against the effects of knowledge and power that invests scientific discourse."²⁴ One of the 'scientific' discourses that he aims to disturb is Marxism, but more specifically, the Marxist conception of power, and linked to this, its privileged notion of historicity.

Historicity, in effect, is the modern replacement for traditional teleologies and origins. Foucault contests the "economism" in the Marxist conception of power, an "economic functionality",

present to the extent that power is conceived primarily in terms of the role it plays in the maintenance of the relations of production and of a class domination which the development and specific forms of the forces of production have rendered possible. On this view, then, the historical *raison d'être* of political power is to be found in the economy.²⁵

²³ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p.97.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.97.

Whether it be the Marxian paradigm of the dialectic of production, or the Hegelian scheme of *Geist* realizing itself in human history, Foucault rejects the very notion of an historical *raison d'être*. He claims to be "completely opposed to a certain conception of history that uses as a model a sort of grand evolution which is continuous and homogeneous, a sort of grand mythical life."²⁶ Such a conception of history, contends Foucault, "implies that the relations of power, that function in a society ... rest upon a definite relation of forces that is established at a determinate, historically specifiable moment ... [and] that the mechanisms of power are those of repression."²⁷

The paradox in this conception is that the very introduction of historicity leads to the "immobilization" of History. The *raison d'être* in Marxian history, for example, evolves until the pressures attached to the forces of production (exploitation, alienation) render human existence itself precarious at which time man revolts and History comes to a halt. It is a history that embodies its own limitations and progressively moves towards them, finally marking the end of the drama: "The moment History reaches such boundaries it can do nothing but stop, quiver for an instant upon its axis, and immobilize itself forever."²⁸ For Fou-

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.88-89, (italics mine).

²⁶ Foucault, interview in *Le Monde*, May 3, 1969, p.8. Cited in Thiele, "Foucault's Triple Murder," p.253.

²⁷ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, pp.90-91.

cault, "the great continuous chain of History [and] the great dream of an end to History is the utopia of causal systems of thought."²⁹

The tide of History will at last become slack. Man's *finitude* will have been *defined* -- once and for all, that is, for an *indefinite* time.³⁰

Historicism, as Foucault showed, bears its own teles. As the historical drama draws to a close one must inquire as to the fate of the actors. History, situated within human finitude, inevitably reveals anthropological finitude. That is, History reveals man to himself. As Foucault so eloquently describes the denouement:

History will have led man's finitude to that boundary-point at which it will appear at last in its pure form; it will have no more margin permitting it to escape from itself, it will have no more effort to make to provide a future for itself, and no new lands to open up for future men; subjected to the great erosion of History, man will gradually be stripped of everything that might hide him from his own eyes; he will have exhausted all the possible elements that tend to blur and disguise beneath the promises of time his anthropological nakedness; by long, but inevitable and tyrannical paths, History will have led man to the truth that brings him to a halt, face to face with himself.³¹

²⁹ Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p.259.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.263.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.259.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.260.

Foucault responds only with a "philosophical laugh -- which means ... a silent one" to those "who still wish to talk about man, about his reign or his liberation, to all those who still ask themselves questions about what man is in his essence, to all those who wish to take him as their starting-point in their attempts to reach the truth, to all those who, on the other hand, refer all knowledge back to the truths of man himself."¹²

For Foucault, anthropological investigations never reveal the truths of man, for "truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint ... it induces regular effects of power."¹³ This power/knowledge nexus is the "terrible truth" of man that Nietzsche proclaimed, and that Foucault seeks to explore.

Necessarily following from Foucault's rejections of origins, teleology, and historicity, is the rejection of pure ontology. With the historical drama scrambled, the actor may only reveal his character through the donning of masks and acts of power. The very conception of Man as an authentic subject is refuted. In his place, Foucault presents Man as an artifact, a creation of power. On this point, Foucault's rejection of the repressive theory of power becomes most explicit.

¹² Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp. 342-343.

¹³ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 131.

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Power is employed and organized through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate through its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target: they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.³⁴

The individual is thus both the constituent and the vehicle of power. Foucault's intent is to uncover the mechanisms on which this power operates. The mechanisms should be taken seriously, warns Foucault, for they are not so much negative and repressive, as they are positive and generative -- producing knowledge, multiplying discourse, inducing pleasure, and generating power. Foucault's task was to locate the points of emergence and conditions within which power operates, thus revealing its strategies.

3.3 Sexual Strategies

In this vein, Foucault took up his investigation of sexuality, not because it is "the most intractable element in power relations," but rather because it is "endowed with the greatest instrumentality ... an especially dense transfer point for relations of power."³⁵

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.98.

³⁵ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p.103.

What is sexuality? It is not a biological means for reproduction of the species, not something that gives pleasure, not the bodies and relations between two people. Rather, sexuality is a "great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power."³⁶ In short, sexuality is a discourse mediated by power, a means of harnessing human energies and human pleasures for the production of truth. At the root of the apparatus of sexuality is sex as the "code of pleasure" which dictates that "sex is at the heart of all pleasure," and as such, must be regulated and controlled. Indeed what emerges is a "systematization of pleasure according to the laws of sex," but the apparatus of sexuality which it gives rise to is not characterized by a rejection of sex, but rather "a *positive economy* of the body and of pleasure."³⁷

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.105-106.

³⁷ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, pp.190-191, (italics mine). Here Foucault's work is prefigured by Rousseau's *Discourse on Political Economy*, exemplary of strategies that constitute a "positive economy" of the body. For Rousseau, the 'true' constitution of the state is written in the hearts of man, and administration reaches deep into the hearth, regulating all aspects of life from food consumption and hygiene to fertility and mortality. One of the points being that government (or powers that be) *forms* social behaviour rather than responds to free-acting subjects.

Foucault contends that

since the Middle Ages nothing has been subject to so much study, interrogation, extortion, revelation, discussion, obligation to confession, demand for expression, and praise, until finally, it found its words. No civilization has known a more talkative sexuality than ours.³⁸

These discourses on sex multiplied not "apart from or against power, but, in the very space and as the means of its exercise."³⁹ Foucault claims that the history of sexuality, far from being one of repression is characterized instead by the 'deployment' of sexuality.

Sex provided a means of access both to the "life of the body" and the "life of the species." It was tracked down "in behaviour, pursued in dreams" and thus "became the stamp of individuality" as well as the "theme of political operations." Hence, "it was put forth as the index of society's strength, revealing of both its political energy and its biological vigor."⁴⁰ Rather than operating on the juridical model, power assumed two different but inter-connected poles. The first

centred on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the *disciplines*: an *anatomo-politics*

³⁸ Foucault, "Sorcellerie et folie," interview in *Le Monde*, April 23, 1976, p.18. Cited in Thiele, "Foucault's Triple Murder," p.250.

³⁹ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p.105.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.146.

of the human body.⁴¹

The second,

focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population.*⁴²

Sex becomes the tool of power by which the body is disciplined and society is regulated. The self-investment of power into bodies and pleasures stimulates and structures the sexual discourses. What occurs is the production of sexuality and not the repression of sex.

With access to the body power could constitute life, instead of articulating itself around death.⁴³ By latching onto bodily desires power gripped individuals where they are most vulnerable. Foucault argues that power constituted "sex itself as something desireable ... and it is this desirability of sex that attaches each one of us to the injunction to know it, to reveal its law and power." It is this same desireability that makes us "think we are affirming the rights of our sex against all power, when in fact we are fastened to the deployment of sexuality that has lifted

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.139.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ One should consider here the 'tradition's' preoccupation with the finitude of death, and the endless projects to overcome it.

up from deep within us a sort of mirage in which we think we see ourselves reflected -- the dark shimmer of sex."⁴⁴

Administration of life co-penetrates with the knowledge of life's processes and capabilities. What emerges is a certain "technology of the flesh" or a "scientia sexualis." The flesh was "brought down to the level of the organism." Pedagogy, economics, and medicine made sex a concern of the state. Sex became a public property that required individual bodies and the social body to come under surveillance. Pedagogy both constituted and had as its objective the "specific sexuality of children," medicine the "sexual physiology peculiar to women," and demography the "spontaneous or concerted regulation of births."⁴⁵

The flesh as an organism became the subject of study for the emerging disciplines of biology, psychology, criminology, and so forth. The very notion that "we have a sexual nature is itself a product of those modes of knowledge designed to make us objects of control." Moreover, "our acceptance that we have such a nature makes us an object of such control. For now we have to find it and set our lives to rights by it. And finding it requires the help of experts." It requires that we "put ourselves in their care, be they the priests of old or the psychoanalysts or social workers of today. And part of putting ourselves in their hands is our avowal, the requirement that we go on trying to

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157.

⁴⁵ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 186.

say what we are like."⁴⁶

Sexuality becomes part of a stratagem of power that operates on the premise that men and women have a desire to know themselves, or rather have a "will to truth" about themselves. The forces at work thus constitute sex as one of the key 'doors' of knowledge. If humans can cross the threshold and know what sex means then they could properly define their being. Power pushes one to pursue knowledge by promising liberation from the tensions of human experience. Yet, paradoxically, the tensions themselves are constituted within the overall economy of bodies. We are presented "as enigmas who need external help to resolve ourselves" and for whom sexuality is the "locus of a crucial fulfillment for ourselves as human beings."⁴⁷ We conceive of a true inner nature that constitutes us as sexual beings which is waiting to be revealed or to come to full expression.

It is a misguided tactic, claims Foucault, to be exclusively fighting repression and seeking liberation. We have been fooled by a ruse of power that meant to keep us occupied and distracted, and ignorant of its real workings. Although we cannot fully understand the many ways in which we are objects of control, we can at least grasp the notion that we are no longer controlled *solely* by the 'old model' of power as repression. Although we like to think that we are

⁴⁶ Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," *Political Theory*. Vol.12 No.2 (May 1984), pp.160-161.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

freeing ourselves when we throw off sexual prohibitions, we are nonetheless incited by images of what it is to be a healthy, fulfilled, liberated sexual being. Power responds to the "revolt of the body" in an

economic (and perhaps also ideological) exploitation of eroticization; from sun-tan products to pornographic films. Responding precisely to the revolt by the body, we find a new mode of *investment* which presents itself no longer in the form of control by *repression* but that of control by *stimulation*. "Get undressed -- but be slim, be good-looking, tanned!"

In throwing off prohibitions we think we are liberating ourselves from repressive power, but in fact we live under a new, 'modern' kind of power that we are far from escaping. We unwittingly play its game, let it shape us, and remain tied to the whole apparatus of sexuality." The ruse "reveals itself as particularly diabolic. The experience that we have a sexual nature that is held down and created by taboos is itself created by power. We become dedicated to the "endless task of ... exacting the truest confessions

" Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p.57 (italics mine). Foucault's point is central to understanding the astounding increase in eating disorders (anorexia and bulimia) among young women in the last several decades. They are responding to society's increasing demand (communicated at numerous levels and through various media) that women should be thin. A recent study shows that while, in actuality, the average body size of women has increased significantly since World War Two, the 'ideal' image of the woman's body, as exemplified by several leading fashion and men's magazines, depicts increasingly slimmer women. For an excellent analysis of this aspect of 'anatomy-politics' see Kim Chernin, *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).

" Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," pp.161-162.

from a shadow."⁵⁰

3.4 Resisting Foucault

Exposing shadows is precisely Foucault's aim. As they are brought to light the illusions of origins, historicity, and subjectivity disperse. While many feminists cling to the notion of an authentic subject rooted in pure origins, there are several who fully endorse Foucault's project and see it as "particularly useful to refute the tendency, displayed by some current trends of feminist thought to define women as completely excluded from (dominant) culture and as such, innocent of and uncontaminated by its values and signifying practices."⁵¹

Indeed Foucault should be compelling for feminists, if for no other reason, than that he exemplifies what feminism purports to stand for, that is, thinking otherwise. Michel de Certeau writes that Foucault is "brilliant (a little too brilliant): His writing sparkles with incisive formulations. He is amusing, stimulating, dazzling. His erudition

⁵⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p.159.

⁵¹ Rosi Braidotti, "Ethics revisited: Women and/in philosophy," p.54. Several other feminist theorists who incorporate some of the central elements of Foucault's thought are: Geraldine Finn, "The Pornographic Eye/I"; Jana Sawicki, "Foucault and Feminism: Toward a Politics of Difference"; Marcelle Thiebaut, "Foucault's Fantasia For Feminists: The Woman Reading". (Full references are cited in the Bibliography).

confounds us; his skill compels assent; his art seduces. Yet something in us resists."⁵² If it is not exactly resistance, it might be the initial "bewitchment" giving way to a "second-degree assent," which as Certeau suggests, we might have difficulty explaining.

A clue to at least a partial answer of why "something in us resists" might be found in German feminist Biddy Martin's article "Feminism, Criticism, and Foucault." Martin argues that Foucault's work on power and the subject is crucial to feminist resistance to Woman being fixed as the 'Other' in male discourse. She calls for feminists to divest themselves of ontologies which assume that females maintain a privileged relationship to nature, truth, or meaning. In short, she urges feminists not to reinscribe conventional categories by positing an authentic and universal category, *Woman*, who is caught in a perpetual struggle against patriarchal power. Despite her endorsement of Foucaultian strategy, however, something in Martin resists and seriously reconsiders:

There is the danger that Foucault's challenges to traditional categories, if taken to a "logical" conclusion, if made into imperatives rather than left as hypotheses and/or methodological provocations, could make the question of women's oppression obsolete.⁵³

⁵² Michel de Certeau, "The Black Sun of Language: Foucault," *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*. trans. Brian Massumi. Theory and History of Literature, Vol.17. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p.171.

⁵³ Biddy Martin, "Feminism, Criticism, and Foucault," p.17.

French feminist Monique Plaza shares Martin's concern, and demonstrates why in her polemic against Foucault's views of rape laws in France. In "Our Damages and Their Compensation: Rape: The Will Not to Know of Michel Foucault," Plaza, despite the esteem in which she holds Foucault, lashes out at him for advocating that rape not be treated as a sexual crime but as any other physical assault (and thus removing the sexual aspect of rape from legal control or juridical punishment). Foucault's recommended amendments to French rape law are recorded in *La folie encerclee*, in which he displays a curious ambiguity. At first he appears to acknowledge the sexual aspect of rape, but claims that it should not be at issue when rapists are penalized:

when rape is punished, it is exclusively the physical violence that should be punished.⁵⁴

He then implies that it is not even a matter of excluding the sexual aspect from the legal picture, because it does not exist in the first place:

Whether one punches his fist in someone's face, or his penis in the sexual organ makes no difference.⁵⁵

But it does make a difference -- the difference between the sexes. The act of rape opposes men and women. It posits the penis as possessor of the vagina, women's bodies as the

⁵⁴ Foucault, in Collectif Change, *La folie encerclee*. Cited in Monique Plaza, "Our Damages and Their Compensation: Rape: The Will Not to Know of Michel Foucault," *Feminist Issues*. Vol.1 No.3 (Summer 1981), p.27.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.28.

property of men."⁶

What is this curious defence of 'sexuality' on Foucault's part? He suggests that in these cases one could (if so disposed) "always adhere to the theoretical discourse which consists of saying ... sexuality cannot under any circumstances be the object of punishment."⁷

Sexuality for Foucault, as we know, is the product of strategies of power acting upon the body and pleasures. To advocate that the particular sexuality which is rape not be subject to the penal code is in effect to say that "the system of power which has the bodies of women as its object of privileged appropriation not be forbidden," but instead punish only the violence."⁸

Yet it is clear that this aspect of sexuality, whether it is 'natural' or a construct of power relations is oppressive of women. Theoretically, Foucault seems to concede the oppression of women within the modalities of power that constitute sexuality. However, by asking women to agree to laws that would see rape as "nothing but an assault," he denies (and asks that women deny) the specific sexual oppression that they suffer in practice.

⁶ The rape of a man fits into the same framework. When a man is raped he is appropriated as a woman. Jean-Michel in *Histoires d'Elles* recounts: "I had been raped like a woman, I was looked upon as a hole, and I didn't want to be a woman anymore." Cited in *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.26..

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.27.

Plaza sees Foucault's adherence to his theoretical discourse furnishing a "closure," a "great confinement" over women's struggle against this particular locus of power. After making his recommendations in *La folie encerclee*, however, Foucault admits:

"I am not sure that women would agree."⁵⁹

Indeed they have displayed their disagreement. Women have "shouted, written, debated, organized -- against rape," all in order to prove that being raped is not like being punched in the face.⁶⁰ That is, women, within the network of power relations have articulated a number of points of resistance to men's strategies of sexual power. Resistances, as Foucault informs us in *The History of Sexuality*, "that are possible, necessary, improbable ... spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent." Resistances which exist, Foucault explicitly claims, "where there is power."⁶¹

The problem is that for Foucault, resistance, like power, is a nominal category, "the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society."⁶² This poses severe problems for 'resisters' (such as women), because objects of power and resistance, like their sub-

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.29.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, pp. 96,95.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.93. On the nominalism of resistance see "Non au sexe roi," p.124.

jects, are always dissolving. In fact, Foucault seems to undermine the success of any strategy of resistance because no subject of resistance can exist with any permanence. Ironically, Foucault's nominalism allows the importance of sexuality to be undermined. Foucault has shown us the heavy burden of sexuality, its inexorable demands. Yet, by attempting to (legally) deny sexuality its power, Foucault implies that its negation is simply a matter of changing one's perspective. Bertrand Russell once wrote that only savages and metaphysicians believe in the magical, constitutive power of words. Foucault's attack on Western metaphysics, however, arrives at a nominalism that is susceptible to a disturbingly similar faith in the power of words. Imagining penises to be fists, and vaginas, faces, does not make them so.

Chapter IV
THE BODY AS PRETEXT

L'ecrivain est quelqu'un qui joue avec le corps de
sa mere.

- Roland Barthes¹

Roland Barthes' epigram is open to numerous translations. Translation itself is neither a "benign, nor an unambiguous activity. To translate may refer to one or more of the following definitions:

- (1) to express in another language, or in plainer words
- (2) to explain in other words; interpret
- (3) to change into another form; transform²

To translate a text is also to assume it, to make it one's own. It renders the unfamiliar, familiar.³

¹ Cited in, Alice Jardine, "Death Sentences: Writing Couples and Ideology," in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Susan R. Suleiman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), p.89.

² Definitions from *Funk & Wagnall's Standard Dictionary*., except 'in plainer words' from *Concise Oxford Dictionary*.

³ In this sense, interpretation (of a text in its own language) is a translation simplified by one dimension, but is not, for that reason, necessarily benign or unambiguous.

A case in point is the recent English translations of a number of texts written by French feminists presented in the anthology *New French Feminisms*. Helene Cixous, one of France's foremost feminist critics once complained, "We translate what the American women write, they never translate our texts." The dedication of this particular anthology is to "all the writers and translators of [the] texts, without whom silence and absence would continue."⁴ Silence and absence has now been partially overcome with these and subsequent translations. However, as the adjective 'new' in the anthology's title betrays, even in English there remains an element of unfamiliarity in these texts. That is, the French feminists' ideas themselves are foreign, even when expressed in familiar language. They are not easily appropriated.⁵ The gap between the French and American feminist discourse might best be articulated by American literary critic Sandra Gilbert, who describes the immersion into French texts as "going to sleep in a realm of facts, which one must labor to theorize, and waking in a domain of theory, which one must strive to (f)actualize."⁶ It would be an oversimplification to say that American feminists are preoc-

⁴ *New French Feminisms*. Eds. Elaine Marks & Isabelle de Courtivron. (New York: Schocken Books, 1981).

⁵ I should also note that the 'new' in the title implies an opposition to an 'old'. I suspect here that the opposition is to traditional American feminist discourse.

⁶ Sandra M. Gilbert, Introduction to Helene Cixous & Catherine Clement, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing. *History of Literature*, Vol. 24. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p.x.

cupied with facts while the French are immersed in theory. Nonetheless, fundamental differences exist.

The text by Roland Barthes, with which this chapter opens, will provide the leitmotif for the entire discussion. Our task here is to translate Barthes' epigram according to each of the definitions of translation mentioned, as it will shed light on the central features and objectives of French feminist discourse. As we proceed, we must struggle with the unavoidable uncertainties of our translations.

Expressed in English, Barthes reads:

The writer is someone who plays with the body of his mother.

The literal translation is rather straightforward. The gender of the writer is assumed to be male unless specified as "femme-ecrivain." There is some ambiguity, however, with regard to whether the body is alive or dead.

Since Barthes' text contains all the important reference points for this chapter, a translation of the second kind, interpretation, is in order. Thus far we know that the male writer (subject) is someone who plays (verb) with either the living or dead body (object) of his mother. A closer examination is required.

Looking first at the subject or male writer, it is apparent that his maleness stands in opposition to femaleness in general, and more specifically, to the female mother. His identity as writer defines him as one who marks symbols,

gathers words, composes and produces text -- in itself a creative activity. In Barthes' formulation, however, the writer is even more fully defined. Afterall, he is the one who engages in a certain activity which engenders his identity as a writer. That is, he is a writer by virtue of playing with his mother's body. What is the character of his play? Deciphering this cannot be done apart from the object with which he plays. It may be that he plays as one plays an instrument to produce music, performing upon the mother's body. Or he may employ her body as one would a pawn in a chess game. Perhaps he shapes and manipulates the mother's body, playing as one would with putty. He might play as an actor engaged in a drama with an opposing player. Yet again, his play may be trifling, playing carelessly with the mother's body, even flippantly or derisively. Regardless of the connotation of play, the object which is played with, against, or upon, remains both separate from and appropriated by the active subject. The mother's body as an object of play enables the writer to assume the title of writer. Writing is a creative activity, and it is by utilizing and appropriating the one who begat him that the male writer himself begets. Thus since his very production and identity as a writer depends upon it, it is rather serious play in which he engages. Serious indeed, because it consists of displacing his mother as creator in order to assume the generative role himself.

The question arises as to the state of the mother's body. Is she alive or dead? Probably neither, yet both. The mother's body exists on a continuum for the male writer. As Alice Jardine suggests in "Death Sentences," the classical masculine writing economy requires certain conditions. One requirement of male writers is maternal love and nurturance from their "muses, mistresses, or mothers in order then to put them aside, deny them, reject them, idealize them or kill them in their writing ... to *ingest* them so as better to evacuate them, purify themselves."⁷ To ingest the mother is to consume her, to kill her. But to subsequently evacuate or excrete the mother is to transform her -- a kind of translation.

The male writer thus becomes generative, a mother of texts. Hence a peculiar reversal of the logical sequence of creation occurs. The original begetter is relegated to second place while the begotten son assumes the predominant generative role.⁸

The translation of the mother, however, is never complete. The male writer must perpetually consume and recreate the mother and, as Adrienne Rich suggests, use her bodily fluids as ink.

You worship the blood
you call it hysterical bleeding

⁷ Alice Jardine, "Death Sentences," p.89.

⁸ The idea of woman "coming second" was suggested by Dr. Patricia Parker in the Gauss lecture at Princeton University, February 26, 1987. It is a standard motif of most all epic and heroic narrative and theory.

you want to drink it like milk
you dip your fingers into it and
write.'

But this is only part of the story. The writer may have ink but he needs a pen. The other condition for writing within the classical masculine writing economy is identification with the Father. That is, rejecting or purging oneself of the mother in order to identify with the Father.¹⁰ Identification with the Father provides the writer with the necessary instrument for writing, (as Derrida terms it) a 'pen-penis'. The author thus requires a blank or virgin page upon which to set his pen and create a text. The male consumes and then evacuates his mother in order to purify himself, but also in order to procure a blank page. In a contradictory way, the mother provides both the messy blood/milk/ink and the pristine page with which the male writer creates. Authorship unquestionably belongs to the male "who is primary and the female [is] his passive creation -- a secondary object lacking autonomy ... denied intentionality," excluded from the "creation of culture, even as it reifies her as an artifact within culture."¹¹

⁹ Adrienne Rich, cited in Susan Gubar, "The Blank Page and the Issues of Female Creativity," *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 8 No. 2 (Winter 1981), p. 258.

¹⁰ Alice Jardine, "Death Sentences," p. 89.

¹¹ Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," p. 247.

The issue of male creativity and mastery via the appropriation of the female body is taken up directly by certain French feminists who conceive of an 'écriture féminine' -- a specifically feminine writing economy. As in the masculine economy, the female body acts as pretext, but is to remain unviolated.

4.1

Pretense of Mastery

The propagation of psychoanalysis ... has shown us, ever since Freud, that interpretation necessarily represents appropriation, and thus an act of desire and murder.

- Julia Kristeva¹²

As the interpretation of Barthes' male writer suggests, the appropriation/interpretation of the mother's body engenders the writer's identity. She is his 'pre-text', coming before his own text, both as page and ink and as his reason/excuse for writing. The writer, as we all recognize, is he who assumes, manipulates, titillates, and regurgitates words -- exercising his authority over them, expressing his mastery of them. Most writers write to be read, but perhaps not read too easily. That is, leaving themselves open to

¹² Julia Kristeva, "Within the Microcosm of 'The Talking Cure'", cited in *Reading Lacan*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p.27.

interpretation but not quick and easy consumption.

One of Jacques Lacan's principle criticisms of Freud was that he made himself too accessible, too easy to read, translate, capture, distort, and even kill. Lacan learned from the Master's errors, and redressed them. Lacan's work may be viewed as the reappropriation of the mastery that he believed Freud too easily relinquished. Lacan made certain not to repeat the same mistake. Whereas Freud may have been too easily grasped, Lacan became notorious for remaining elusive.

Lacan's Writings have been described as "finely wrought, even overwrought," resembling poetry because they "yield to critical thinking. Yet this resemblance is a ploy, a rhetorical ploy ... a decoy; they do not yield; they cannot be read."¹³ *Ecrits*, the title under which Lacan's major works to 1966 were compiled has been described as a lure. The title, connoting generic 'Writings', promises an equally generic reading. But this is not the case. In fact, the master himself, in a postscript to one of his published seminars, speaks of "writing not-to-be-read."¹⁴ Yet Lacan publishes in order to be read. Thus implying that while he may make himself legible he does not intend to be 'edible'. He sets out to defy translation. Lacan made the same claim with regard to Joyce: "[il] ne se traduit qu'à peine."

¹³ Stuart Schneiderman and Jane Gallop, in Gallop, *Reading Lacan*, pp. 33-34.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47. This postscript does not appear in the English translation.

This in itself, however, has a double translation: he is hardly translatable, or rather is so but only with pain."¹⁵

Lacan's writing, claims the author of *Lacan*, "attests to an incontestable mastery of the tongue. The ... plays ... are never the product of chance, but of a work of rare complexity."¹⁶ Lacan plays then, but does so seriously, leaving nothing to chance. His tongue is masterful, but with what does it play so deliberately, so thoroughly? Perhaps his *Ecrits* emerged once he "got good into her Book, tongued her every passage, thumbing her leaf and rubbing his hands all over her binding."¹⁷

Perhaps this display of mastery over the female body prompted Lacan to declare in "Le Seminaire XX" that he could "explain what *it's* all about." Because women "don't know what they are saying, and that's the whole difference between them and me."¹⁸ He is well versed in his subject matter. Having so thoroughly read Woman's body he can incorporate her into his own text. Lacan clearly derives

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.48..

¹⁶ Jean-Michel Palmier, *Lacan*, cited in *Ibid.*, p.40. As the title of Palmier's book demonstrates he has ingested and digested the master enough to evacuate him between the covers of this book. On the contrary, Jane Gallop's title *Reading Lacan*, points to an admission that her labour with Lacan is ongoing -- munching on small bits and perhaps even suffering from indigestion.

¹⁷ Ishmael Reed, cited in Gubar, "The Blank Page" and Female Creativity," p.246.

¹⁸ Lacan, cited in Luce Irigaray, "C'osi Fan Tutti" in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Trans. Catherine Porter. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985 (1977)), p.86.

much pleasure from his authority. In his famous lecture "God and the Jouissance of The Woman," Lacan told a largely female audience that he would take the "half an hour left to try to introduce you, if I dare express myself, to what is involved on the [pleasure] side of the woman."¹⁹

Lacan can so succinctly describe women's pleasure because he is (as Jane Gallop has suggested) a real 'ladies man'. As such, he needs to be with the women in order to know the secrets of their pleasure, but must remain distinct from them to preserve his position of authority. This particular lecture begins with Lacan confessing: "For a long time now I have desired to speak to you while strolling a bit among you."²⁰ Lacan needs his playtime with the women, but cannot become one of them lest he should lose his audience. His position as Master is rarely in doubt. For even when he strolls among the women taking pleasure in watching them write down his every word, he asserts himself: "You can write Sade how you like" -- with a capital ... or with a small letter."²¹ On the stage or in the audience he strolls, as Jane Gallop delightfully describes, like "the

¹⁹ Lacan, "God and the Jouissance of The Woman," in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne* trans. Jacqueline Rose. Eds. J. Rose & J. Mitchell. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1982), pp.143-144.

²⁰ Lacan, cited in Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p.33.

²¹ Lacan, "A Love Letter," in (Eds.) Mitchell & Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, p.158.

cock of the walk."²² He derives his pleasure not from being *with* the women, but from strutting *among* them, watching them flutter.

Lacan's presence causes commotion among the women. His words provoke, incite, persuade, excite -- in short, he seduces and is scandalous. In an equally scandalous manner, Gallop describes Lacan as a prick.²³ The epithet is especially appropriate in this discussion because it has numerous translations: a vulgar reference to the male sexual organ or penis; an obnoxious or abusive man who flagrantly displays his power. A prick also stings or induces a tingling sensation. One is both attracted to and repelled by Lacan's 'prickish' tendencies, Gallop suggests, because he "does not play by the rules ... of orderly systematic discourse."²⁴ The rules of Lacan's discourse ensure that he remains difficult to read or interpret, thus affirming both the Master's authority and his pleasure.

Lacan strolls among the women, tongues them, reads them, writes them -- apparently even reveals *them to themselves*. All the while he seemingly remains unpecked, undiminished, uninterpreted -- his integrity intact. But even the untouchable flirt has his moments of weakness. Gallop contends that the best way to read Lacan (with the most satisfaction) is to attend to his "odd marginal moments, slips of the

²² Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction*, p.158.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.36.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.37.

tongue, unintended disclosures."²⁵ Such moments when the masterful tongue becomes twisted, leaving his authority in question, are rare enough in Lacan. Yet he claims that "the speaker is subjected to language rather than master of it."²⁶ This points to one of the most intriguing contradictions in Lacan's thought. On the one hand he gives much evidence of being the Master of language, but on the other, he undermines his theory that the speaker is the subject of language by supposedly not being subject to language himself. In her translation of Lacan's seminars, Jacqueline Rose comments:

Much of the difficulty of Lacan's work stemmed from his attempt to subvert that position from within his own utterance, to rejoin the place of 'non-knowledge' which he designated the unconscious, by the constant slippage or escape of his speech, and thereby to undercut the very mastery which his own position as speaker (master and analyst) necessarily constructs.²⁷

Ironically, Lacan's entrapment within the paradox of his own utterance foreshadows much of what is central to the French feminist project. That is, to locate ground from which to speak which manages to retain its independence from patriarchal categories of language rather than reinscribe them.

²⁵ Gallop, *Reading Lacan*, p.22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.43.

²⁷ Jacqueline Rose, Introduction to (Eds.) Mitchell & Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, p.50.

The question of mastery is central to all French feminist discourse. In fact, one common critique made by American feminists is that their French counterparts have not succeeded in exorcising the ghosts of certain Masters like Lacan. That this even is a goal is largely an American assumption. Instead, Lacanian psychoanalysis has been a fundamental starting point for French feminist explorations, which maintain a focus on both psycho and linguistic theory. While many of the French feminist projects move beyond the intellectual space defined by Lacan, rarely do they altogether abandon it.

Without the pretense of mastery of Lacan, I shall attempt to summarize the features of Lacan's reading of Freud which are crucial to the question of woman. The intent is to lay the ground upon which 'dissident' Lacanian/French feminist Luce Irigaray may enter the discussion. Accompanying Irigaray, but not necessarily supporting her, will be several other French feminists. These dissonant voices will make evident that it is misleading to speak of one French feminism. Despite their differences, however, the French, by virtue of sharing common intellectual roots, stand quite distinct from their Anglo-American feminist counterparts. In sum, the French discourse can be identified as more 'self-reflective': French feminists are concerned with the role and place of their "voice" in the patriarchal tradition and with the designations of "self" and "other" that they transgress.

The Lacanian school is a machine which snatches the faithful away from mastery [emprise] of their mother tongue ... It's a question here, in effect, of an essential function of the Church, which must have absolute mastery [maitrise] of language ... : the mass will thus be said in Lacanian.

- Francois George, student
of Lacan²⁸

If he makes holes in his discourse, it's on purpose; if he sputters, if he stammers, it's not infirmity ... it's total mastery of the play of words.

- Catherine Clement, former
student of Lacan/
Feminist critic²⁹

It seems very difficult to shift this discussion away from the point of Lacan's mastery -- to escape it. In the same passage from her book on Lacan, Clement asserts that Lacan was caught in a "mastery he said he did not want ... from which he never managed to escape." If this is true, then he was, in a paradoxical way, as much the "subject of his own mastery" as were his disciples.³⁰ Again one is

²⁸ Francois George, cited in Gallop, *Reading Lacan*, p.50.

²⁹ Catherine Clement, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, cited in *Ibid.*, p.42.

³⁰ Gallop, *Ibid.* For someone attempting to escape his own mastery Lacan had a peculiar way of often reaffirming it publicly. One of the more outrageous examples, as Gallop mentions, is that all articles in the Lacanian journal *Scilicet* were published anonymously except for Lacan's which he signed. Thus affirming that "no one has the phallus" but Lacan. Furthermore, in 1980, in what was a challenge to institutions and authority, as well as a supreme authoritative act, Lacan unilaterally dissolved the *ecole freudienne*. He did so "in order to stop ... the degradation of his ideas under the weight of his own

struck here by the parallels to the 'subjection' of women and the aspirations of feminists. Immersion in patriarchal culture, like immersion in Lacanian teachings, leads to the loss of the 'mother tongue'. The entanglement in the net of patriarchal language, like Lacan's own entrapment in his discourse, makes it difficult, if not impossible, to speak otherwise. At this point, I shall make the deliberate shift to what has by now become my patent concern, the focus on language and symbol in Lacanian discourse.

4.2 Beyond The Freudian Principal

In "Feminine Sexuality in Psychoanalytic Doctrine," Lacan sets out two objectives. The first is to demonstrate that "phallicism is an unconscious phenomenon" and secondly, to show "the common root of the phallic function in its relation to discourse."¹ Both of these objectives, as we shall see, imply a revision of Freud's theory of the dissolution of the Oedipus complex which was discussed in the second chapter.

The pre-Oedipal child, contends Lacan, exists within an Imaginary Order. The child perceives itself on a continuum with its mother and the surrounding world, and experiences only dyadic identity and presence. The Oedipal crisis, how-

institution." Cited in Preface to *Feminine Sexuality*.

¹ Lacan, "Feminine Sexuality in Psychoanalytic Doctrine," in Mitchell & Rose, (eds.) *Feminine Sexuality*, p.135.

ever, puts an end to the illusion, introducing difference and absence into the child's hitherto unfragmented existence. The dual unity of mother and child is divided by the father, who as the third term introduces difference into the original relation. He also introduces the 'Law of the Father' represented by the phallus which further separates the child from his mother's body. Thus for the first time the child experiences absence. Desire for unity with the mother must, under the threat of the phallic law, be repressed. From this (what Lacan terms) "primary repression" emerges the Unconscious. Let us now tread more carefully as we approach the areas where Lacan radically redefines Freud.

The classical Freudian Unconscious portrays "a seething cauldron of archaic instincts."³² Following from this depiction of the unconscious is the constitution of another, opposite realm of language, thinking, and consciousness. Ultimately, it would be misleading to assert that Freud conceived of the unconscious instincts and drives in a "pure state." Regardless of how "energetically boiling," they were not to be conceived "independently of their representations."³³ Nevertheless, Lacan clearly imposes a "linguistic determinism" on Freud's formulation of the unconscious which results in the now famous Lacanian edict: "The Unconscious

³² Fredric Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject," *Yale French Studies*, No.55/56 (1977), p.365.

³³ *Ibid.*

is the discourse of the Other."¹⁴ The radical nature of Lacan's claim and his departure from the classical Freudian image of the unconscious becomes even more evident in his "Seminar of 21 January 1975" when he contends:

There is nothing in the unconscious which accords with the body. The unconscious is discordant. The unconscious is that which, by speaking, determines the subject as being.¹⁵

Studies of the unconscious are thus characterized by linguistic analyses rather than explorations of a dark pool. Jameson emphasizes that, despite its radical nature, "Lacan's work must be read as presupposing the entire content of classical Freudianism."¹⁶ Lacan himself makes the same claim, stressing that Freud was engaged in linguistic analysis (associations, puns, slips of the tongue), only without the advantage and terminology of modern linguistics: Lacan professes to simply be taking Freud's work to its inevitable conclusions. With the aid of modern structural linguistics, Lacan apparently sees in Freud what Freud himself did not see. Thus leading one to conclude that Lacan has succeeded in mastering the Master. As the new *paterfamilias* of psychoanalysis Lacan decrees that "the structure of

¹⁴ Lacan, cited in *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Lacan, "Seminar of 21 January 1975," in (Eds.) Mitchell & Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, p.165.

¹⁶ Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan," p.358.

the unconscious is the structure of language."¹⁷

The debate over whether Lacan's mastery of Freud constitutes a revision or a transformation is ridden with difficulties, as are most questions of translation. The discussion shall carry forth with the assumption that Lacan is engaged in (what was designated as the third type of translation at the beginning of this chapter) transformation. Jameson would seem to support this assumption as he argues that "the very cornerstone of Freud's conception of the psyche, the Oedipus complex, is *transliterated* by Lacan into a linguistic phenomenon."¹⁸

In order to more fully define the character of the Lacanian unconscious we must return to the point where Lacan identifies its *emergence* -- the Oedipal resolution. Primary repression, or repression of the desire for unity with the mother results in the unconscious. Because Lacan contends that the structure of the unconscious is the structure of language, language also emerges as a result of primary repression. In fact, the two are more than just intimately connected -- they co-penetrate, and perhaps are even indistinguishable. Lacan insists upon the distinction between needs (unmediated, pure, biological) and desires, "conceivable only after the emergence of language." It is a "conception of desire as a proto-linguistic demand, and of the

¹⁷ Jan Miel, "Jacques Lacan and the Structure of the Unconscious," *Yale French Studies*. No.36/37 (1966); p.108.

¹⁸ Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan," p.359.

Unconscious as a language ... [a] topology and typology of desire."³⁹

At the Oedipal resolution the boy and girl both discover the "Name-of-the-Father" which in effect constitutes the "transformation of an Imaginary relationship to that particular imago which is the physical parent into the new and menacing abstraction of the paternal role as the possessor of the mother and the place of the Law."⁴⁰ The child thus leaves the pre-Oedipal, pre-linguistic Imaginary Order and enters the linguistic Symbolic Order.

Attributing a name to the Father or exercising the function of naming in general, transforms the relation of the child to its surrounding world. It in effect designates the child as subject in an object world. For Lacan, "a name, no matter how confused, *designates* a particular person" and marks the moment when a child "enters into a symbolic relationship."⁴¹

Entry into the Symbolic Order and accession to language enables the child to utter "I am" as distinct from "you are" or "she is." Thus attesting to the loss of presence and identity experienced in the Imaginary Order. Lacan translates "I am" as "I am that which I am not."

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 367, 368.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

The speaking subject that says 'I am' is in fact saying 'I am he (she) who has lost something -- and the loss suffered is the loss of the imaginary identity with the mother.'⁴²

The child become subject now experiences himself as distinct from the world become objects. Knowing and pointing to the penis as 'possessor of the mother' and 'place of the Law' is to recognize its representation in the Symbolic Order. The crucial question arises here with respect to the difference between Freud's and Lacan's conception of the phallus. As we saw in the earlier discussion of Freud, the penis/phallus was an appropriate term because the dynamics of the castration complex, while corporally rooted also extended symbolically.

Jameson contends that for Lacan the meaning of the phallus is beyond both the organic/corporal and the symbolic because of its crucial position in language:

The notorious "phallic" symbol dear to vulgar Freudian literary criticism -- is the *very instrument* for the Lacanian reinterpretation of Freud in *linguistic terms*, for the phallus -- not, in contradistinction to the penis, an organ of the body -- now comes to be considered neither image nor symbol, but rather a signifier, indeed the *fundamental signifier* of mature psychic life, and thus one of the basic organizational categories of the Symbolic Order.'⁴³

⁴² Toril Moi, "From Simone de Beauvoir to Jacques Lacan," *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, (New York: Methuen, 1985), p.99.

⁴³ Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan," p.352. (Italics mine)

Jameson's reading thus offers a relatively fixed meaning of the Lacanian phallus. The authors of *Lacan and Language* "find that the Lacanian phallus oscillates, it wavers ... it is precarious."⁴⁴ Gallop suggests that attending to the 'slippage' of Lacan's phallus likely renders a more provocative reading. In a 1973 seminar on this subject, Lacan once complained that "every one of his students has produced gibberish regarding the phallus ... [and] that his students do not read him as well as his attackers."⁴⁵ This may well be the case, since his attackers, seeking to challenge his authority, watch for slippage in Lacan's masterful discourse. I shall take Lacan at his word, and pursue the remainder of the discussion concerning Lacan through the eyes of his former colleague and foremost challenger, Luce Irigaray. By way of introduction to Irigaray, I shall first examine the work of Julia Kristeva, feminist theorist of semiotics, whose interpretation of Lacan will serve to further elucidate Irigaray's project. Of central concern in the discussion that follows will be the question of the Other that arises in Lacan.

⁴⁴ Cited in Gallop, *Reading Lacan*, p.143.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.139.

4/8 Julia Kristeva

Roland Barthes gave the title "L'etrangere" to a review he once wrote of one of Julia Kristeva's important works. "L'etrangere" was an obvious reference to Kristeva's Bulgarian nationality and her foreign status in France, but more particularly to her relation to the theory of language. Her work was seen as unsettling, radically subversive. Barthes wrote: "Julia Kristeva changes the order of things: she always destroys the latest preconception, the one we thought we could be comforted by, the one of which we could be proud ... she subverts the authority of monologic science."⁶ Kristeva herself posed the question: "To work on language, to labour in the materiality of that which society regards as a means of contact and understanding, isn't that at one stroke to declare oneself a stranger/foreign [etranger] to language?"⁷

Lacan's influence is apparent in Kristeva's thought. Like him she challenges the notion of a transcendental subject and instead posits a "speaking subject." That is, by speaking the subject is determined as being. As we saw earlier, for Lacan the unconscious is the structure of language. Desires only emerge with language and language itself is a "topology and typology of desire." For Lacan

⁶ Barthes, cited in Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader* Ed. Toril Moi. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p.1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.3.

and Kristeva, the dynamics of language and desire are the same. Both are 'intelligible' only within the Symbolic Order. Like desire, language 'invests' itself in objects (signifiers), continuously moving from one to the other. "The subject," Lacan claims, "is caused by an object ... inasmuch as it [subject] ex-ists ... the striking thing is that it ex-ists in discord."⁴⁸ Language and desire emerge from the lost unity with the mother (that which is forever lost). Desire moves from object to object, as language moves from signifier to signifier, and will "never find full and present satisfaction just as meaning can never be seized as full presence."⁴⁹ Therefore, language like desire is a "complex signifying process rather than a monolithic system"⁵⁰ Within this dynamic process the "speaking subject" comes to be, not once and for all as a Being, but is perpetually becoming (being). That is, the subject who is constituted in language comes to be not as a universal subject in a universal language, but as a subject particular to a specific discourse. Thus for Kristeva, as for Lacan, all meaning (including the subject) is constituted within the specifics of language. In short, it is contextual.

⁴⁸ Lacan, "Seminar of 21 January 1975", in (Eds) Mitchell & Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, pp.164,165.

⁴⁹ Toril Moi, "From Simone de Beauvoir to Jacques Lacan" in *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p101.

⁵⁰ Toril Moi, "Marginality and Subversion: Julia Kristeva," in *Ibid.*, p.152.

What Lacan describes as the Imaginary Order, Kristeva terms the semiotic. It refers to that period of unmediated infantile pleasures, both pre-paternal and pre-phallic. In keeping with psycho-analytic discourse, Kristeva identifies the feminine and the maternal with the semiotic. The mother is the child's "*semiotic chora* (enclosed space, womb), the space and receptacle defining its limits, the boundaries of its psycho-physical existence."⁵¹

Plato contends in the *Timaeus* that the *chora* is an "invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible." Similarly, in *La Revolution du langage poetique* Kristeva argues that the *chora* is "a wholly provisional articulation that is essentially mobile and constituted of movements and their ephemeral stases ... neither model nor copy, it is anterior to and underlies figuration and therefore also specularization."⁵² What may be seen as a semiotic continuum must be separated in order for 'signification' to occur, and for language and the subject to emerge. The Symbolic Order, as Elizabeth Gross suggests, "owes a debt of existence to an unspeakable, prelinguistic ... bodily domain of semiotic, libidinal, 'feminine', 'maternal' flows." While Kristeva identifies the semiotic as

⁵¹ Elizabeth Gross, "Philosophy, subjectivity, and the body: Kristeva and Irigaray," in (Eds) Pateman & Gross, *Feminist Challenges*, p.130.

⁵² Plato and Kristeva, cited in Toril Moi, "Marginality and Subversion," p.161.

'feminine' and 'maternal' she insists nonetheless that "there can be no specific or determinate relation between this powerful semiotic ... and women."⁵³ This constitutes a most peculiar disembodiment of the adjectives 'feminine' and 'maternal'. Kristeva's 'revolution of poetic language', or what she terms *semanalysis* is characterized by a very maternal or feminine "pulsional pressure on symbolic language." In no way, however, does it constitute a new language, only the "heterogeneous, disruptive dimension of language" which does not become "caught up in the closure of traditional linguistic theory."⁵⁴

At least two crucial issues arise from Kristeva's semiotic project. Both are connected to her interpretation of two of the 'masters' that are at the root of her discourse. With respect to Lacan, Kristeva ultimately endorses his position which fixes Woman as unknowable Other. Displaying a profound suspicion of feminine or female identity, Kristeva asserts: "I ... understand by 'Woman' that which cannot be represented, that which is not spoken, that which remains outside naming and ideologies ... What can "identity," even "sexual identity," mean in a new theoretical ... space where the very notion of identity is challenged?"⁵⁵

⁵³ Elizabeth Gross, "Philosophy, subjectivity and the body: Kristeva and Irigaray," p.130.

⁵⁴ Toril Moi, "Marginality and Subversion," p.162.

⁵⁵ Kristeva, cited in *Ibid.*, p.163.

But where is this new theoretical space? The feminine and maternal features of the semiotic are already posited in both Freudian and Lacanian discourse, and while semiotic 'pulsions' disrupt the Symbolic Order, they do not transform it. The semiotic thus still remains outside of, Other to, and represented through the Symbolic Order. Its only representation in the Symbolic Order is negative.

In addition to Lacan, Kristeva's semanalysis is further informed by the notion of Derridean deconstruction. She interprets deconstruction, however, as an entirely negative activity. This aspect of Derrida's discourse is intended to be disruptive. Kristeva identifies the feminine and maternal with the semiotic, attributes the semiotic with a rupturing role in the patriarchal Symbolic Order, and there ends her translation. She refuses to translate (transform) the semiotic into Woman or female identity.

Kristeva's position is linked to her reluctance to create what she views as a new master discourse based on feminine essentialism. She argues instead for a plurality of female discourses, privileging the individual subject over a theory of femininity. She claims to favour "an understanding of femininity that would have as many 'feminines' as there are women."⁵⁶ Kristeva's hope is that

feminism will be able to break free of its belief in Woman, Her power, Her writing, so as to channel this demand for difference into each and every element of the female whole ... to bring out the singularity of each woman, and beyond this, her

⁵⁶ Kristeva, cited in *Ibid.*, p.169.

multiplicities, her plural languages, beyond the horizon, beyond sight.⁵⁷

Kristeva truly is an avant-garde theorist, perhaps too avant-garde for many feminists whose quest for a female/feminine identity that can be interpreted as feminist self-representation is dismissed by Kristeva. Yet she endorses an understanding of woman as a multiplicity of meanings, (a goal that most feminists would endorse). The problem, as the subsequent discussion of Irigaray will demonstrate, is that Kristeva has missed a crucial intermediary step. She posits the transformation of the female/feminine from an incomprehensible, unknowable Other who speaks only to disrupt the Symbolic Order into a 'femininity' endowed with multiple meanings and voices. One moves from the *chora* to non-specific femininity without any indication of how or why such a disruptive femininity is feminine.

Kristeva's semiotic work towards disrupting fixed linguistic categories is crucial to feminism, but her present work cannot be seen as primarily feminist. She prefers not to distinguish women and the feminist struggle from other marginal or subversive groups: "Call it 'woman' or oppressed classes of society, it is the same struggle, and never the one without the other."⁵⁸ Despite this generally professed denial of female specificity, Kristeva has at

⁵⁷ Kristeva, "Women's Time" in *The Kristeva Reader*, (Ed) Toril Moi, p.208.

⁵⁸ Kristeva, cited in Toril Moi, "Marginality and subversion," p.164.

times alluded to its theoretical value. In looking back on her own theoretical outlook she admitted: "It was perhaps also necessary to be a woman to attempt to take up that exorbitant wager of carrying the rational project to the outer borders of the signifying venture of men."⁵⁹

4.4 Irigaray contra Lacan -- The Father's Seduction

The phallus is the privileged signifier of that mark where the share of the logos is wedded to the advent of desire.... If the phallus is a signifier then it is in the place of the Other that the subject gains access to it ... It is this desire of the Other as such which the subject has to recognize, meaning, the Other as itself a subject divided.

-Jacques Lacan, "The Meaning of the Phallus"⁶⁰

Lacan's phallic principle grew to such a point that similar to Juliet's admonishment of Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*, Irigaray suggested that Lacan should shorten his tale/tail and stop occupying the argument. The decisive moment came in 1974 with Irigaray's publication of *Speculum of the Other Woman*. While the master may have admitted that his attackers read him well, he did not welcome a challenge from within his own ranks and thus promptly dismissed Luce Irigaray, the once dutiful daughter who had become unruly, from the

⁵⁹ Kristeva, in *The Kristeva Reader*, (Ed) Toril Moi, p.3.

⁶⁰ Lacan, "The Meaning of the Phallus" in (Eds) Mitchell & Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, pp.82,83.

ecole freudienne. Lacan's reaction suggests that Irigaray had indeed 'gotten good into his Book', penetrated and appropriated him.

Speculum of the Other Woman is Irigaray's re-reading of the texts that constitute the tradition of Western philosophy. When speaking of her method in *Speculum*, she admitted: "What was left for me to do was to *have an orgy with the philosophers*."⁶¹ Included in this tradition are both Freud and Lacan, thus implying that the 'daughter's' reading of the 'old' and 'new' *paterfamilias* involves incestuous intercourse.

Irigaray is the 'daughter', previously seduced by the 'father', who now seduces him. Particularly scandalous is the fact that the 'daughter' uses the 'father's' own methods against him, thus going one step beyond him, but never altogether detaching herself from him.

4.5 Phallic Conjunctions

Irigaray incorporates Lacan's reading of Freud into her own work, thus endorsing the privileging of language, as well as reinscribing Lacan's authority. She does not, however, allow him to have the last word. Rather, the Father's phallic presence is necessary since Irigaray's intent is to expose his authority as 'phallacious'.

⁶¹ Luce Irigaray, cited in Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction*, p.78 (Irigaray's italics).

Father, as we know, is possessor of the penis and bearer of language and culture. Lacan designates the phallus as the 'privileged' signifier thus indicating that along the infinite chain of signifiers (those 'somethings'; objects capable of bestowing meaning) the phallus stands out as the signifier of signifiers -- bestowing the *most* meaning because it stands as the *most* capable of imposing differentiation. As Eagleton emphasizes: "a sign has meaning only by dint of its difference from other signs and ... presupposes the *absence* of the object it signifies."⁶²

In "The Meaning of the Phallus" we see that the presupposed absence is the castrated mother. This is a point where one must attend to the slippage of meaning between phallic signifier and anatomical and/or symbolic penis.⁶³ The phallus is the privileged signifier chosen, Lacan contends, "as what stands out as most easily seized upon in the real of sexual copulation." Yet the boy's crucial understanding comes not so much with knowing "he has a *real* phallus ... inasmuch as he learns that the mother does not. This is the moment of experience without which no symptomatic or structural consequence ... can take effect."⁶⁴

Critical knowledge then is of the mother's castration -- this absence or lack which constitutes her as Other in relation to the Father. Thus for Lacan "it is in the place of

⁶² Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p.166.

⁶³ Lacan, "The Meaning of the Phallus," in (Eds) Mitchell & Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, p.82,83.

the Other that the subject gains access" to the phallus as signifier.⁶⁴ In other words, self-representation (a place in the symbolic order) requires identification with the phallus. For boys this means being signified as 'sameness' with the phallus by virtue of their otherness to the castrated female. The girl of course is signified as otherness. The peculiar feature is that the phallic signifier not only bestows meaning on other objects, but must itself be signified in order to be meaningful. Thus the necessity of Lacan's 'presupposition' of female absence against which phallic presence constitutes itself. "The phallus," Lacan informs us "is the privileged signifier of that mark where the share of the logos is wedded to the advent of desire."⁶⁵ As we know desire is only conceivable in language, moving from signifier to signifier in a quest for fulfillment. Desire for identity and presence in the symbolic order is wed to castration and absence as the phallic signifier is the mark of desire. The "share of the logos" is the law that emerges from this structure which will, Lacan claims, govern the relations between the sexes.

The wedding of the logos and the phallus provides the focus for Irigaray's critique of Lacan and of Western metaphysical discourse. She focuses on Lacan's "phallogocentrism", a rich and revealing neologism coined by Derrida which weds the phallic principle and logocentrism implying

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.83.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.82.

that Lacanian discourse is "guilty of identifying the phallus with the Logos as transcendent, and therefore, unexamined (and unexaminable) grounds of signification."⁶⁶

Unlike Kristeva, Irigaray's intent is not only to challenge and disrupt phallogocentric structures while accepting and remaining within the designation of unknowable Otherness, but to challenge this very Otherness which bestows meaning upon the phallus, making it a signifier. Hence she invokes a notion of female specificity, that while not utterly definable is not completely unknowable.

4.6 Stages of Representation

Irigaray's feminist objective is to

disconcert the staging of representation according to *exclusively* "masculine" parameters, that is, according to a phallogocentric order. It is not a matter of toppling that order so as to replace it -- that amounts to the same thing in the end -- but of disrupting and modifying it, starting from an "outside" that is exempt in part, from phallogocentric law.⁶⁷

Irigaray's references to staging will guide us through the remainder of the discussion. In this instance she refers to the staging of a drama or play, more specifically, the great drama of representation running throughout Western metaphysics which constructs a binary opposition of subject and object. The two terms are not only locked into opposi-

⁶⁶ Carolyn Burke, "Irigaray Through the Looking Glass," *Feminist Studies*. Vol. 7 No. 2 (Summer 1981), p. 293.

⁶⁷ Luce Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine," in *This Sex Which Is Not One* trans. Gillian C. Gill, p. 68.

tion but fixed in a hierarchy. The presence of one term relies on the absence of the other. The first term (phallus for example) constitutes itself by positing the existence of an absent invisible castrated other. The requisite for representation in the symbolic order is tangibility, identity, and visibility, or 'turgidity' as Lacan suggests. Consequently, all that does not meet these criteria finds no place in the Symbolic Order as described by Lacan or in the language of Reason characterizing the Western tradition. The antinomies (in this case male-female) are constructed in such a way that the first term only comes to know itself and therefore be knowable through the constitution of the second term as an absence.

A rather peculiar (if not perverse) relationship exists between these oppositions. In order to create and understand itself, the first term (male) must challenge, interrogate, titillate, manipulate, the second term (female). The second term is posited by the first and serves as a point of resistance for these exercises of power. By acting upon the second term the first comes to know itself. The perversity lies in the fact that while the first is playing with, and to use a Nietzschean term, "fingering" the Other -- all acts which serve to make the Other vulnerable and transfixed -- he knows that his own identity and presence relies on assuring that the Other remains invisible and absent, that is, undefined and undefinable in its own terms.

Irigaray proposes that feminists disrupt the phallogocentric structure and the notion of a unified female identity in stages. The initial path she proposes is for women to introduce themselves into "a tightly-woven systematicity" by assuming the role historically assigned to the feminine: that of *mimicry*". Playing with mimesis can be an attempt for woman "to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse ... so as to make *visible* by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain *invisible*."⁶⁸ The objective is to attempt to give form and meaning (make knowable) that which is intended to remain obscure, thus appropriating it for oneself. The point then is not to rival men in the production of truth but to jam the "theoretical machinery" and attempt to "wrest this question away from the economy of the logos." Hence Irigaray suggests a "disruptive excess on the feminine side."⁶⁹ Irigaray stages her own performance featuring feminine *jouissance* as the disruptive excess.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.76.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.78.

⁷⁰ *Jouissance* is rich in connotations. From the verb *jouir*, to enjoy, to revel in without fear of cost, pleasure, to have an orgasm. "This pleasure, when attributed to a woman is considered to be of a different order from the pleasure that is represented within the male libidinal economy ... Woman's *jouissance* carries with it the notion of fluidity, diffusion, duration ... without concerns about ends or closure." Cited in *New French Feminisms*, p.36.

4.7 Feminine Writing Economy

Jouissance is the motif for Irigaray's "écriture féminine", an attempt to write the female body. The metaphors and symbols of this feminine writing economy are typically connected to a feminine morphology, but taken to extremes. Giving form to the absence retrieved from male discourse implies the creation of meaning. Irigaray engages in such creation self-consciously and not without irony. In "When Our Lips Speak Together" she 'posits', as a parody, the labia, the multiple sexual lips that are "constantly in touch" and "speak together" as the signifier of all signifiers. Her vulval or vaginal sexual fables are intended to symbolize the diffuse sensuality of the female body as opposed to the delineated phallus of the male.⁷¹

Seeing my mother's sex organs (voir le sexe de ma mère): that gave me quite a shock. No body existed less for me -- nor existed more.

-Simone de Beauvoir

*A Very Easy Death*⁷²

⁷¹ Taking jouissance as a motif also constitutes a response to Lacan. In his seminar "God and the Jouissance of The Woman," Lacan asserted that women could not speak of their own jouissance: "...the woman knows nothing of this jouissance ... we've been begging them ... begging them on our knees to try to tell us about it, well, not a word! Cited in (Eds) Mitchell & Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, p.146.

⁷² Beauvoir, *A Very Easy Death*, cited in Alice Jardine, "Death Sentences," p.94.

It was a fine cry -- loud and long -- but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow.

*Sula*⁷³

- Toni Morrison

Woman's body as pretext for woman's writing is intimately (although not exclusively) connected to woman's reproductive capacities. Thus Irigaray employs what may be seen as 'typically feminine' metaphors of female creativity -- the womb, fluids and blood. "Re-semblance cannot do without red blood. Mother-matter-nature must go on forever nourishing speculation," claims Irigaray. In the masculine writing economy these resources (while necessary) are the "waste product" of male creativity. Whereas they constitute the syntax and lexicon of the feminine writing economy.⁷⁴

In both the male and female 'economies' these metaphors are part of the "masquerade of femininity." In the traditional masquerade, one *becomes* a woman upon "entry into a system of values that is not hers ... in which she can *appear* and circulate only when enveloped in the needs /desires/fantasies of others, namely, men."⁷⁵ Irigaray proposes a *self-conscious* masquerade of femininity taken to the extreme. Feminine categories articulated in phallic dis-

⁷³ Toni Morrison, *Sula*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), p.174.

⁷⁴ Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse," and "Questions," *This Sex Which Is Not One*. trans. Gillian C. Gill, pp.77, 84.

⁷⁵ Irigaray, "Questions," in *Ibid.*, p.134.

course' are not opposed but continuously extended. As a "style of writing" it puts "the torch to fetish words, proper terms, well-constructed forms ... [it] 'does not privilege sight; instead it takes each figure back to its source, which is among other things *tactile*. It comes back in touch with itself in that origin without ever constituting itself in it, as some sort of unity.'" ⁷⁶ From the exaggerated categories of the feminine, motifs such as "self-touching", "proximity", and "self-affection" emerge, "rebounding from one to the other." This interplay, claims Irigaray, defies interruption and appropriation, thus resists being centred in phallic discourse.

What also emerges (unsystematically) are what Irigaray terms "elsewheres" or points of new nourishment for feminine speech. Jouissance or feminine pleasure, which has had little 'representation' in male discourse, is an 'elsewhere' that women can articulate without merely opposing a phallic category. Likewise, the relationship of mother and daughter might provide a space that one can point to as "elsewhere." This would be distinct from the mother's fate of being consumed within male discourse, and equally distinct from the antagonistic mother-daughter relation constructed within the same discourse. Irigaray contends that both mother and daughter are "captives of confinement" within the phallogocentric discourse.

⁷⁶ Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse," in *Ibid.*, p.79.

And the one doesn't stir without the other. But we do not move together. When the one of us comes into the world, the other goes underground. When the one carries life, the other dies. And what I wanted from you Mother, was this: that in giving me life you still remain alive."⁷⁷

Feminist criticism of Irigaray's project ranges from sympathetic but doubtful -- "her project is ultimately impossible but necessary," --⁷⁸ to cynical:

Her method remains fundamentally naturalist and completely under the influence of patriarchal ideology....one cannot describe morphology as though it presented itself to perception, without ideological mediation.... women's essence, woman's being. All that *is* woman comes to her in the last instances from her anatomical sex, which touches itself all the time. Poor woman!"⁷⁹

To accuse Irigaray of essentialism is to misinterpret her. She does not advocate speaking or writing *from* the body assuming that unmediated speech flows from it. Instead she proposes the body as a pretext, an analogy with which one may attempt to speak and write. To see Irigaray's project as a theory of femininity is to disregard its greatest strength: strategic irony. Irony disrupts the "fantasy of authority." Irony consists in dragging authority into a scene which it cannot master, of which it is unaware, and for that reason is the scene of its own self-destruction."⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Irigaray, "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other," trans. H.V. Wenzel. *SIGNS* Vol.7 No.1 (Autumn 1981), p.67.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Gross, "Philosophy, subjectivity and the body: Kristeva and Irigaray," p.135.

⁷⁹ Monique Plaza, cited in Toril Moi, "Patriarchal Reflections: Luce Irigaray's looking glass," pp.146,147.

Irony opens the possibilities for "elsewheres" to emerge.

" Shoshana Felman, "To Open the Question," *Yale French Studies* No. 55/56 (1977), p.8.

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