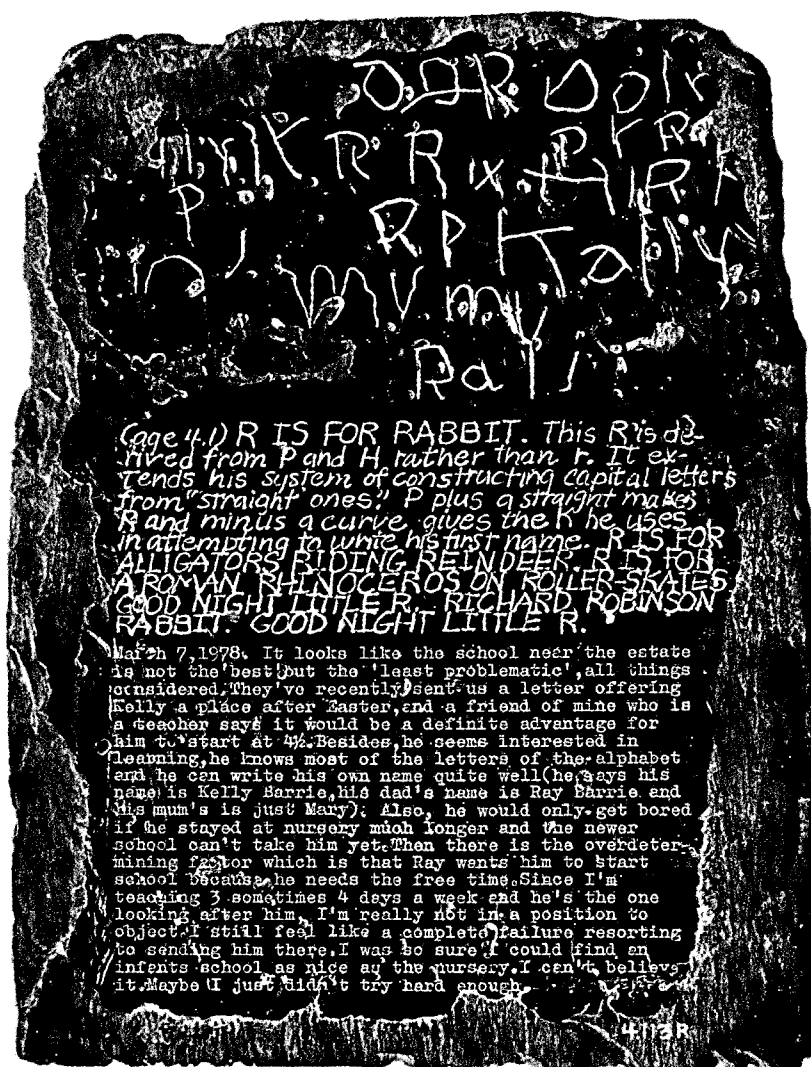




radical, critical, *and* pleasurable positioning of the woman as spectator to be done?

Desire is caused not by objects, but in the unconscious, according to the peculiar structure of fantasy. Desire is repetitious, it resists normalization, ignores biology, disperses the body. Certainly, desire is not synonymous with images of desirable women; yet, what does it mean, exactly, to say that feminists have refused the "image" of the woman? First, this implies a refusal to reduce the concept of the image to one of resemblance, to figuration, or even to the general category of the iconic sign. It suggests that the image, as it is organized in that space called the picture, can refer to a heterogeneous system of signs—indexical, symbolic, and iconic. And thus, that it is possible to invoke the non-specular, the sensory, the somatic, in the visual field; to invoke, especially, the register of the invocatory drives (which, according to Lacan, are on the same level as the scopophilic drives, but closer to the experience of the unconscious), through "writing." Secondly, it should be said that this is not a hybrid version of the "hieroglyph" masquerading as a "heterogeneity of signs." The object is not to return "the feminine" to a domain of pre-linguistic utterance; but rather, to mobilize a system of *imaged discourse* capable of refuting a certain form of "culturally overdetermined" scopophilia. But why? Would this release the "female spectator" from her hysterical identification with the male voyeur?

Again, the implications of suggesting that women have a privileged relation to narcissism or that fetishism is an exclusively male perversion should be re-considered. Surely, the link between narcissism and fetishism is castration. For both the man and the woman this is the condition for access to the symbolic, to language, to culture; there can be no privileged relation to madness. Yet there *is* difference. There is still that irritating asymmetry of the Oedipal moment. There is Freud's continual emphasis on the importance of the girl's attachment to her mother. And there is Dora.⁶ What *did* she find so fascinating in the picture of the Sistine Madonna? Perhaps, above all, it was the possibility of seeing the woman as subject of desire without transgressing the socially acceptable definition of her as the mother. To have the child as phallus; to be

the phallic mother; to have the pleasure of the child's body; to have the pleasure of the maternal body experienced through it; perhaps, in the figure of the Madonna, there was a duplication of identification and desire that only the body of another woman could sustain.

For both the man and the woman, the maternal body lines the seductive surface of the image, but the body *he* sees is not the same one *she* is looking at. The woman's relation to the mother's body is a constant source of anxiety. Montrelay claims that this relation is often only censored rather than repressed. As a consequence the woman clings to a "precocious femininity," an archaic oral-anal-vaginal or *concentric* organization of the drives which bar her access to sublimated pleasure (phallic *jouissance*).⁷ Similarly, with regard to the artistic text, and if pleasure is understood in Barthes' sense of the term as a loss of preconceived identity, rather than an instance of repletion, then it *is* possible to produce a different form of pleasure for the woman by representing a specific loss—the loss of her imagined closeness to the mother's body. A critical, perhaps disturbing sense of separation is effected through the visualization of exactly that which was assumed to be outside of seeing; precocious, unspeakable, unrepresentable. In the scopic register, she is no longer at the level of concentricity, of repetitious demand, but of desire. As Lacan points out, even the eye itself belongs to this archaic structure since it functions in the field of vision as a lost object.⁸ Thus, the same movement which determines the subject's appearance in language, that is, symbolic castration, also introduces the gaze. And the domain of imaged discourse.

Until now the woman as spectator has been pinned to the surface of the picture, trapped in a path of light that leads her back to the features of a veiled face. It is important to acknowledge the masquerade that has always been internalized, linked to a particular organization of the drives, represented through a diversity of aims and objects; but at the same time, to avoid being lured into looking for a psychic truth beneath the veil. To see this picture critically, the viewer should be neither too close nor too far away.

6. See Sigmund Freud, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" (1901), *Standard Edition*, vol. 7, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1968).

7. Michèle Montrelay, "Inquiry into Femininity," *m/f*, no. 1 (1978): 86-99.

8. Jacques Lacan, "What is a Picture," in *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 118.



picture; an expressionistic composite of looks and gestures which flaunts the uncertainty of sexual positioning. She refuses the lack, but remains the object of the look. In a sense, the fetishistic implications of not-knowing merely enhance the lure of the picture, effectively taming the gaze, rather than provoking a de-construction. Another (and perhaps more politically motivated) tactic has been to self-consciously assume the "patriarchal facade"; to make it an almost abrasive and cynical act of affirmation. By producing a representation of femininity in excess of conventional codes, it shatters the narcissistic structure which would return the woman's image to her as a moment of completion. This can induce the alienating effect of a mis-recognition, but the question persists: how can she represent herself as subject of desire?

The (neo-)feminist alternative has been to refuse the literal figuration of the woman's body, creating significance out of its absence. But this does not signal a new form of iconoclasm. The artist does not protest against the "lure" of the picture. In another way, however, her practice could be said to be blasphemous in so far as she seeks to appropriate the gaze behind it (the place of gods, of *auteurs*, and evil eyes). In her field of vision femininity is not seen as a pre-given entity, but as the mapping-out of sexual difference within a definite terrain, a moment of discourse, a fragment of history. With regard to the spectator, it is a tactic of reversal, attempting to produce the woman, through a different form of identification with the image, as the subject of the look.

A further consequence of this reversal is that it queries the tendency of psychoanalytic theory to complement the division of the visual field into sexually prescribed positions by rhyming repression/perversion, hysteria/obsession, body/word... with the heterosexual couplet seer/seen. Yet, this division does not seem to be sustained in Freud's work itself. According to Freud, sexual identity is said to be the outcome of a precarious passage called the Oedipus complex; a passage which is in a certain sense completed by the acceptance of symbolic castration. But castration is also inscribed at the level of the imaginary, that is, in fantasy, and this is where the fetishistic scenario originates and is continually replayed. The child's recognition of difference between the mother and the father is above all an admission that the mother does not have the phallus. In this case seeing is not necessarily believing, for what is at stake for the child is really the question of his or her

own relation to having or being. Hence the fetishist, conventionally assumed to be male, postpones that moment of recognition, although certainly he has made the passage—he knows the difference, but denies it. In terms of representation, this denial is associated with a definite iconography of pornographic images where the man is reassured by the woman's possession of some form of phallic substitute or alternatively by the shape, the complete arrangement, of her body.

The question of masculine perversions is an important one. But it would be a mistake to confine women to the realm of repression, excluding the possibility, for example, of female fetishism. For the woman, in so far as the outcome of the Oedipal moment has involved at some point a heterosexual object choice (that is, she has identified with her mother and has taken her father as a love object), will also postpone the recognition of lack in view of the promise of having the child. In having the child, in a sense she has the phallus. So the loss of the child is the loss of that symbolic plenitude—more exactly the ability to represent lack.⁴

When Freud describes castration fears for the woman, this imaginary scenario takes the form of losing her loved objects, especially her children; the child is going to grow up, leave her, reject her, perhaps die. In order to delay, disavow, that separation she has already in a way acknowledged, the woman tends to fetishize the child: by dressing him up, by continuing to feed him no matter how old he gets, or simply by having another "little one." So perhaps in place of the more familiar notion of pornography, it is possible to talk about the mother's memorabilia—the way she saves things—first shoes, photographs, locks of hair, or school reports. A trace, a gift, a fragment of narrative; all of these can be seen as transitional objects, not in Winnicott's sense, as surrogates, but in Lacan's terms, as emblems of desire. The feminist text proceeds from this site; not in order to valorize the potential fetishism of the woman, but to create a critical distance from it—something which has not been possible until now because it has not been generally acknowledged.⁵ Here the problem of images of women can be re-formulated as a different question: how is a

4. See Sigmund Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" (1924), *Standard Edition*, vol. 19, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1968).

5. See Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

SOME OF THE THINGS AT STAKE IN WOMEN'S STRUGGLES

JEAN-FRANÇOIS LYOTARD

In the form of writing, the question of the relations between men and women is itself caught up in these relations.

It may be that you are forced to be a man from the moment that you write. Maybe writing is a fact of virility. Even if you write as a woman, "femininely." Perhaps what we call feminine writing is only a variation on a genre that is masculine and remains so: the essay. It is said that the femininity of writing depends on content. Writing is feminine, for example, if it operates by *seduction* rather than conviction. But the opposition of these two efficacies is itself probably masculine.

To avoid such alternatives, you claim no assignable difference between feminine and masculine, in writing or elsewhere: but this *neutralization* of the question is also very suspect (as when someone says that he's not political, neither on the right nor the left; everyone knows he is on the right).

It is a philosopher who is speaking here about relations between men and women. He is trying to escape what is masculine in the very posing of such a question. However, his flight and his strategies probably remain masculine. He knows that the so-called question of a masculine/feminine opposition, and probably the opposition itself, will only disappear as he *stops philosophizing*: for it exists as opposition only by philosophical (and political) method, that is, by the male way of thinking.

In the midst of these aporias, one is tempted to give his pen over to the antonym of the inquisitive adult male, to *the little girl*. But it is said that, like a savage, she doesn't write. And above all, that like savages, she is herself the creation of her so-called opposite, the sober-minded male, who in reality is also her judge: a creation of the jealousy he feels for something he is forbidden to be.

How intelligence supposedly came to women.

The King of Ou says to general Sun-Tse: you who are such a great strategist and who undertake the military training of anyone, take 180 of my women and try to make soldiers of them. Sun-Tse orders them to form two ranks led by the king's two favorites and he teaches them the code of drumbeats: two beats: right-face; three beats: left-face; four beats: about-face. They laugh and talk instead of obeying. He goes over the lesson several times: giggles, disorder, even as they assure him

that they know the code. Fine, he says, you have mutinied; military law calls for death: so you will die. The king is alerted and he forbids Sun-Tse to harm the women, and especially his favorites. Sun-Tse answers: You have charged me with their training, all the rest is my business. And he severs the heads of the two favored women with his saber. As soon as the king's favorites are replaced, the exercise begins again: "and, as though these women had always been soldiers, they become silent and orderly."¹

Thus, one way to separate masculine and feminine. *Primo*: virility claims to establish order and femininity is the compulsion to deride order. There is chattering in the gynaeceum and silence among the troops. Contrary to our story, even though comedy may be a masculine genre, it represents the successful stratagem of weakness; comedy makes men laugh like women; the prisoner Rosine makes a fool of Don Bartholo. This is only a momentary concession: Rosine escapes her tutor only to fall under the law of the real master, the Count Almaviva. He who laughs *last*, laughs best: the aimless humor of women will succumb to the learned, socratic, teleological irony of men.

Secundo: the ruse of reason (masculine) differs from the snares of sensitivity (feminine): reason *makes use of* death. Sun-Tse kills a few women who laugh: that is sobriety. Women must know the fear of death and must overcome it if they are to be civilized (that is, if they are to be virilized). If not, they give in and are subjugated (but continue to laugh up their sleeves); or they don't, a few of them are killed: these are the dead soldiers who can become heroes. Slaves are never entirely reliable: truly civilized women are dead women, or men.

Tertio: What is pertinent for distinguishing the sexes is the relation to death: a body that can die, whatever its sexual anatomy, is masculine; a body that does not know that it must disappear is feminine. Men teach women of death, the impossible, the presence of absence. Tragedy is a noble genre because one does not laugh: in fact, it shows that there is nothing to laugh about. No way to play the woman. Sun-Tse defines a rite of passage: the feminine is on the side of the child, youth, and nature; death is the ferry-man; he shows the way to language, to order, to the consideration of lack, to meaning, to culture.

1. Sseu-Ma Ts'ien, "The Life of Sun-Tse, Mémoires historiques," in *Treize articles sur l'art de la guerre*, by Sun-Tse (Paris: Librairie l'Impensé radical, 1971). Sun-Tse was a *condottiere* and Chinese strategist. It is said that he was active between 512 and 506.

Sexual theory and practice of men includes the threat of death: or sexuality makes no sense without a signifier.

When Freud asks: What does a woman desire? as a man, he is suggesting that she desires nothing since she is passive. And when he says, libido is masculine²—here he agrees with the spectator of pornographic films who answers when asked why women aren't interested in such spectacles: Women? Have you ever seen them take an interest in sex? "Women have no sex"—by libido, Freud means not an instinctual process but an intelligible one, because it desires (*to say*) something.⁴ For Lacan, the signifier inscribing its effects as unconscious statements is the phallus, the *a priori* condition of all symbolic function when this function works on sexually determined bodies. The body has no sex before being traversed by "the defiling of the signifier," i.e., the threat of castration, or death, a mark of Oedipal law.

Difference is established here, they say: the little boy supposedly overcomes the threat of castration to resolve the Oedipus complex, and becomes virile, while the little girl becomes feminine by entering the Oedipus complex under the law of castration. The first must identify with the phallus in spite of the father, the other must content herself with receiving it. Sun-Tse seems to be in agreement with this thoroughly masculine version: a woman is become a man; let her confront death, or castration, the law of the signifier. Otherwise, she will always lack the sense of lack. She thinks herself eternal for this reason and is deprived of sexuality as well as the activity constituting the body's language.

Plato's Socrates says nothing else when he claims⁵ that Love is born not only of ruse, cleverness, and Resource (*Poros*) but also of Lack (*Penia*)—that one does not love what one loves but loves impregnating it and reproducing itself in order to

become immortal; thus he subordinates love to the effect of an absent signifier, the Idea, supreme paradigm which carries bodies beyond themselves. And *he will die* to bear witness to this.⁶ The great virile association of war and sexuality (an association found also in Chinese erotic treatises, which are concurrently manuals of strategy) proceeds from this distribution of the symbolic function: virility has its *price*: life; the body can speak only if it can die and each time it knows pleasure, the body risks becoming lawless and speechless once again—capable only of living and laughing. That is why love is for man a struggle in which his virility, that is, culture, is at stake.

Men (Western men, in any case) want to conquer, not love. They have nothing but disdain and irony for the sensual, for odors, sensations, secretions, *laissez-faire*, music; they call "artists" those among them that consent to these things. But women are the artists. Men feel undone when they love. They prefer prostitutes whose impassivity protects them. A woman's pleasure remains an enigma for them because they have not found the technical means to produce it in a predictable and guaranteed fashion. They prefer the clitoris, which they consider a trustworthy and homologable agent working for them in the adversary's camp. Vaginal penetration consists "then" in the occupation of this camp; it is likewise a *cursus* followed by the conquered until she reaches the ultimate degree of pleasure, which the man claims to extract from her.

But for women, to "come" or not, in the sense of having or not having the spasm men *anticipate* on the basis of their own orgasm—this is *not a question* when women love. The question does not arise and the answer is indifferent. But it concerns virility to not want to know this; for it implies a body whose pieces do not "speak" but "work" without having to produce a meaning they supposedly lack. If pleasure comes easily without love and love without pleasure, then sexual and affective maneuvers would have nothing to do with producing meaning—theoretical (Beautiful, True) or physical (orgasmic "satisfaction").⁷

6. Cf., *Apology of Socrates*, ed. Harold Williamson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963).

7. With respect to this, there is complete continuity between the Platonic theory of love and, for example, the Reichian conception of sexuality. See *The Function of the Orgasm* (1947), trans. Vincent R. Carfagno (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973).

2. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), *Standard Edition*, vol. 7, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1968), p. 219.

3. Survey by G. Sitbon, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, August 18, 1975.

4. Freud, *Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes* (1925), *Standard Edition*, vol. 19, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1968), pp. 248-258.

5. Plato, *The Symposium*, 201d-207a, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, trans. Lane Cooper, et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 555.

Masculine imperialism either relegates women to its borders or makes them homologues of men if it educates them.

Everything is in place for the imperialism of men: an empty center where the Voice is heard (God's, the People's—the difference is not important, just the Capital letters), the circle of homosexual warriors in dialogue around the center,⁸ the feminine (women, children, foreigners, slaves) banished outside the confines of the *corpus socians* and attributed only those properties this *corpus* will have nothing to do with: savagery, sensitivity, matter and the kitchen, impulsion, hysteria, silence, maenadic dances, lying, diabolical beauty, ornamentation, lasciviousness, witchcraft, and weakness. The masculine corpus attributes active principles to itself—so say Hegel, Freud, and all the others: we must seize the object that *seems* human but which, in fact, must *become* human since it is not. Virility's imperialism is warlike and pedagogical; it is all the same: it thinks it has the initiative. It is said that women (and everything feminine) are *reactive*, truly passive, always waiting for the intervention of meaning to become excited, fecundated, cultivated, renewed. Like the Indian and the Arab, they are traitresses whose apparent humanity is always elusive: *rauben*, *rubare*; they are thieves of humanity.⁹

But if we, men, *cannot resist* wanting to seize such an object, perhaps it is because the Voice at the Virile Center speaks only of this: the voice speaks only of the Empire's limits (which are women) and we have to struggle ceaselessly with their exteriority. If so, then is not such an object unconsciously endowed with what we call activity? And does not the power to scheme accorded this object betray the secret reversal of our role by theirs? (Is not there a desire on the part of Western man to be sodomized by woman?) Is not the outside of the man's theater the most important, even for men? Doesn't he discover his "origin" there? And isn't it necessary that this origin be woman: Isn't the mother the originary woman? That is, the way the exterior sex is represented in theory: as ground, itself ungrounded, in which meaning is generated? The senseless Being?

8. Marcel Détienné, "En Grèce archaïque: géométrie, politique et société," *Annales, économies, sociétés, civilisation* 20, no. 3 (May-June 1965).

9. Hélène Cixous, "Sorties," in *La Jeune née*, by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1975).

—Woman could indeed be accepted and honored by the citizen and the politician as mother, the mother of their sons: for as it happens, she is the indispensable intermediary between them and these sons. The *corpus socians* cannot be reproduced without the belly of women. Male homosexuals honor her, but on the fringes of the Empire. Goddesses of fertility are more orgiastic than civic, and their cult is maintained in Greece by banishing it to the obscurity of the Bacchae; it is eliminated in Rome by Christianity, then sublimated as a cult of Mary. The male Christian Westerner does not pay homage to women but to his own reproductive force, stockpiled in the belly of the virgin and exploited in that of the mother.

As for "whores," those women who are neither mothers nor virgins, they ought to be conquered, pacified, sanctified, saved: made our equals. Christianity has already posed the question: should woman be educated, and how. Capitalism generalizes the method proposed below: exclusion of women on the basis of homologation, not exile. Capitalism contributes to the destruction of their position within the family enclosure; according to its needs, it even partially integrates their reproductive function by acting indirectly on their propension to procreate and by treating as commodities their products, those famous sons, as well as the bellies that bear them. The education of women consists in the exploitation of feminine natural resources, of *all* these resources by incorporating them into her reproductive cycles.

Capital seems to actualize the ideal of reproduction of men by themselves: "Mother Earth" disappears,¹⁰ Messieurs Father-Capital and Son-Work consider themselves sufficient for the *corpus sociandum* to reproduce itself without recourse to any external force. Women disappear into the male cycle, integrated either as workers into the production of commodities, or as mothers into the reproduction of labor power, or again, as commodities themselves (cover-girls, prostitutes of

10. An expression of Marx (*Capital*, Vol. 3, Part VII, Section XLVIII: "The Trinity Formula") which protests, moreover, the elimination of Mother/Nature as the source of material wealth in certain interpretations of his theory of labor value. Cf., *Capital*, Vol. 1, Part I, Section 2: "The Twofold Character of the Labour embodied in Commodities," ed. Frederick Engels (New York: International Publishers, 1967); *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Part I (i), rev. trans. (New York: International Publishers, 1966).

mass-media, hostesses of *human relations*), or even as administrators of capital (managerial functions).

Advantages and disadvantages of the consideration of sexual difference by capitalist society.

In any case, women can only be part of modern society if their differences are neutralized. "Eroticism" today, in this truly popular culture composed of pornography, ladies' magazines and the pill, implies this same homologation. It is regulated by the absolute value of the permanent sexual and affective availability called emancipation, liberation, independence, and opposed to the counter-value of the family and conjugality. Now, this value is the very one that capital imposes on men; and those qualities liberty, availability, mobility, are those that conceal their reduction to the status of labor power. Sexual and affective freedom of women (and men) is a capitalist value, not only because it transforms "sex" into a commodity easily negotiated on the (masculine) market, but because (as with free labor) differences must be neutralized to come globally under the law of the interchangeable. (Here differences of sex, but also erotic singularities.) This is how, for example, hysteria—the masculine name for feminine exteriority—enters into a recession.¹¹

A spectator of pornographic film states the same principle of capitalism: "What I like about women in porno films is that they are like men; they always want to make love."¹² Always want to negotiate, to capitalize more "experience": sexuality of expansion, eroticism of conquest, economy of exchange. A few eighteenth-century libertines suggested something similar; the homologation of the sexes (Sade's women ejaculate "sperm") considers love in terms of strategies and tactics (*Laclos*) or even as part of a theory of etiquette (*Crebillon fils*)—in short, treats it as a political relation whose laws are entirely masculine: better to die than suffer. From this perspective, to succeed would be to suffer impassively.¹³

Modern *unisexism* is not entirely bad, however: it offers

11. Ilza Veith, *Hysteria, the History of a Disease* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

12. Survey by G. Sitbon (see note 3 above).

13. A theme articulated in Pierre Klossowski's work on Sade. Cf., *Sade mon prochain*, new ed. (Paris: Les Editions du Seuil, 1967); *La Monnaie vivante* (Paris: E. Losfeld, 1970).

material for new ruses. All the better that the fable of witches and mothers, those half-natural creatures relegated to the *fringes* of a masculine empire, degenerate. Its decline reveals that the differences constituting sexuality are not defined by a political opposition of *corpus socians* and *corpus sociandum*; rather, they penetrate each so-called "individual" body, be it anatomically male or female. Freud believed in the destiny of anatomy; contemporary interest in transvestites, homosexuality, and sex-change operations demonstrates that such belief is on the wane. That all masculine pleasure is not attributed to the emission or retention of sperm, nor even to the erection; that the so-called feminine "components" of pleasure (which compose nothing...) can freely play on bodies whose armor shields them from death; that activity is not the unhappy lot of masculine bodies: that they no longer assume responsibility for attainment of an ideal orgasmic synchronism—these and many other displacements give hope that the signifier's *imperium* over the masculine body can be undone, and that another sexual space could be substituted, a topology of erotic potentialities comparable to the one Freud calls (somewhat hypocritically) *polymorphous perversion* in the child.¹⁴

The "woman's" body would then dis-integrate into a puzzle of potentialities (fertility, passivity, sensitivity, jealousy), none of which would dominate the others. If differences traverse individual bodies rather than opposing a "woman's" body to "man's," then those regions "belonging" to two individuals (or more) would be connected (call the association sadist, masochistic, oblatinal, tender, obsessed, or any other nosographic label—but try to do better!), without prejudging what goes on in other regions of the "same" bodies.

What happens, then, is commonly called love; that is, there is no longer *anyone*, no superior central identity to control and relate what takes place on these intensified surfaces.

So the question is not to safeguard a difference of sex against a movement towards homologation imposed by capital. The "difference between the sexes" is no more exempt from masculine imperialism than its opposite; we have seen this. Claiming difference simply says that human beings can be grouped in two categories: those with a penis and those without. Only the first would belong to the *corpus socians*. The women's movement could be tempted to resist the assimilation of

14. Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, p. 191.

women to men by insisting on this difference, by claiming for themselves the intuition, the pathos, the irresponsibility attributed to them, by making them weapons in their insurrection against phallocentrism. The sphere of "weaknesses" could conceivably be extended and an anti-masculine world established, to be explored only by the voices, cries, whispers and conspiracies of feminine writing.

But this direction could fail and thereby restore the problem of the form in which it is traditionally posed: masculine imperialism gets along well with nocturnal delirium, pastoral dances, and the consumption of raw animal flesh.¹⁵ For the empire needs a border and these provide such a border. In the face of the "irrational," the master-warrior-speaker is reinstated in his pedagogical task: he needs a frontier to conquer and savages to civilize. Let us free him instead from his armor of words and death; let us temper him in a large *patchwork* of affective elements that must be intensified. One should not attack him head-on but wage a guerrilla war of skirmishes and raids in a space and time other than those imposed for millennia by the masculine logos. It is tempting to attribute reversible spaces and paradoxical time to a "feminine principle." But this would be too great a concession to the so-called "male principle" which the "feminine principle" could only complement. Instead, let us propose this as a kind of theory-fiction. Let us set to work forging fictions rather than hypotheses and theories; this would be the best way for the speaker to become "feminine"....

The destruction of metalanguages is at stake in the women's struggle.

One last remark on this subject which was announced at the beginning of the text. The philosopher, as philosopher, is a secret accomplice of the phallocrat. For philosophy is not just any discipline. It is the search for a constituting order that gives meaning to the world, society, and discourse. Philosophy is the West's madness and never ceases to underwrite its quests for knowledge and politics in the name of Truth and the Good. By specifically considering the *question* of men's relationship to women, philosophy (or its contemporary positivist traves-

15. Cf., E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

ties, sociology, anthropology, etc.) sends us in the direction of an *answer*. But this answer will be preceded by the *constitution*, itself a regulated elaboration, of this relationship, and therefore of the terms placed in relation, "man" and "woman." Doctrinal variations, even considerable ones affecting this constitution, are of little importance. What matters is that the question (and the possibility or impossibility of an answer) can be posed only in the *metalanguage* (even impossible, always open) of philosophy. For such a metalanguage is already the language of masculinity in the Western, and particularly Greek, sense.

In fact, where do we actually see metalanguage founded? In those communities of free men who speak a Hellenic language, carry arms, worship the same gods, and submit themselves to the law of equal political rights for all. These are the communities that have formed the core of the *politeia*¹⁶ at the heart of feudal Greek society. Women are excluded at the outset from such groups (along with children, foreigners, half-breeds, slaves). The authority these groups claim for themselves over society as a whole later allows them to impose a general reorganization on the traditional system of *géné*—that is, large families.¹⁷ The language spoken there claims to *constitute* society in its entirety. And this remains true even of contemporary revolutionary Assemblies: of the French, American, Bolshevik revolutions. Inasmuch as this discourse concerns femininity (it happens that femininity is forgotten), femininity is already constituted, or remains to be constituted, as one part of the *corpus sociandum* or even as its symbol: passivity. Hence, it is opposed to those political groups that allocate the responsibilities of the *corpus socians* to themselves. The congruence between the constitution of politics as an institution, a specifically masculine order, and the institution of philosophy as a constituting discourse can be established historically. Perhaps virility in the West since then is nothing other than a concern for the constituent.

So by no means can the question of masculine/feminine relations be reduced to a problem of the division of labor at the

16. Jean-Pierre Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982); M. M. Austin and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Economic and Social History of Ancient Greece*, trans. and rev. M. M. Austin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

17. Pierre Lévêque and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Clisthène l'Athénien* (1964; reprint, Paris: Ed. Macula, 1983).

heart of the social body. The frontier passing between the two sexes does not separate two parts of the same social entity. Not only is it the border where the Empire comes into contact with barbarians, but also the line of demarcation between an empirical given, women, the great unknown, and a transcendent or transcendental order that would give them meaning. The complicity between political phallocracy and philosophical metalanguage is made here: the activity men reserve for themselves arbitrarily as *fact* is posited legally as the *right* to decide meaning. The social groups of distributors, that is, citizens, become confused with the principle that there is something like distributive reason, matter upon which this reason is inscribed or written, and that there is a distinction between matter and reason.

When a "feminist"¹⁸ is reproached for confusing the phallus, symbolic operator of meaning, and the penis, empirical sign of sexual difference, it is admitted without discussion that the metalinguistic order (the symbolic) is distinct from its domain of reference (realities). But if the women's movement has an immense impact, equal to that of slaves, colonized peoples, and other "under-developed" groups, it is that this movement solicits and destroys the (masculine) belief in meta-statements independent of ordinary statements.

All discourse of knowledge depends on a *decision*: namely, that the two statements, *soup is on* and *it is true that the soup is on* do not belong to the same class and should be distinguished. But such a decision cannot itself be proved. In other words, what we call Mentor's "paradox"¹⁹ cannot be refuted. Simultaneously, the decision constituting the discourse of knowledge, constructing a constituting order, appears as a fact of power and power in fact. If "reality" lies, it follows that men in all their claims to construct meaning, to speak the Truth, are themselves only a minority in a *patchwork* where it becomes impossible to establish and validly determine any major order.

Deceitful like Eubulides and like realities, women are discovering something that could cause the greatest revolution in the West, something that (masculine) domination has never

18. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1974).

19. Attributed to Eubulides of Megara, a contemporary of Aristotle. According to Cicero, he says: *If you say that you lie and you speak the truth, you lie*. A formulation more resistant to metalogical reduction is: *I am lying*.

ceased to stifle: there is no signifier; or else, the class above all classes is just one among many; or again, we Westerners must rework our space-time and all our logic on the basis of non-centralism, non-finality, non-truth. A United Nations vote denounced Zionism as racism, to the great scandal of the West which suddenly found itself in the minority. One day a UN vote will denounce as male sexism the primacy accorded theoretical discourse to the great scandal... of us all.

*Translated by Deborah J. Clarke
with Winifred Woodhull and John Mowitt*

TEA WITH MADELEINE

VICTOR BURGIN

"Desire" and the "image"—two terms. And then a third term, the position from which I speak, the "man." Three terms then—"man," "desire," "image"—a triangle of terms where the consideration of one point moves me to the next.

To take the first—"man." "Male," and the opposing term which gives it its sense, "female," labels a body. The most important question asked of any of us is a question we do not, at the time, understand: "Doctor, is it a boy or a girl?" "Female" and "male" are anatomical terms. "Masculine" and "feminine" are sociological and psychological terms, which designate gender roles and/or psychological characteristics along a spectrum between "active" and "passive." Social roles and psychology may be assigned, by social convention and institutions, on the basis of anatomy, but they are not otherwise determined by anatomy.

If "*The woman*" does not exist, as Lacan puts it, striking out the definite article (*The*), then it follows that "*The man*" does not exist either. If I move now, therefore, from my first term, "man," to my second term, "desire," then I am allowed to do so, forming the expression, "man's desire," only if I strike through "*man*"—placing it, in Derrida's expression, "under erasure": I need the term in order to go on speaking, but it signifies the very concept of which my argument must be most suspicious.

Now to move to "desire." The term comes to us, in this context, from the French, *désir*, which in turn translates Freud's *Wunsch* (also, we might add, *Lust*). Whose desire? And for what? "Who," here already under erasure, is of course split: fundamentally, it is the *unconscious* subject that desires. "What," here, leads almost directly to the third term, "image"—"almost" directly, as desire is for an image only via the detour of an object. But the conscious object of desire is always a red herring. The object is only the representative, in the real, of a psychical representative in the unconscious (Freud's "ideational representative" of the instinct). In fact, desire is the instinct, as the Lacanians put it, "alienated in a signifier"—the trace of a primal, lost, satisfaction. The real object, present—most poignantly, the "love-object"—is "chosen" (does choice ever really come into it?—"coup de foudre") because something about it allows it to represent the lost object, which is irretrievably absent. (Thus Freud identifies the structural unhappiness inherent in all sexual relationships; thus Lacan declares, "There is no sexual relationship"—no possibility of the union of mutually complementary beings, only the more or

TEA WITH MADELEINE

VICTOR BURGIN

To start again. A train is stopping now at some nameless station and a little girl is turning to her brother in the carriage and is about to say: "Idiot! Can't you see we're at Gentlemen." This in reply to: "Look, we're at Ladies!" (At this point he rushes off down the corridor to pee—not so much because he has to, but rather to reassure himself it's still there.) Tea has now appeared. They look at each other and put it in their mouths. It is a *Brief Encounter*. They look at one another and suffer. The lady behind the counter is "common" but speaks with a refined accent (the judgement of Celia Johnson's friend): she is of indeterminate identity and stands behind the bar, there, in the position of the TREE. Jack, meanwhile, finds it *occupé*. She, meanwhile, has bolted—rushing out to throw herself under the express; the body in pieces; but she doesn't do it. She goes back into the buffet. The last time that happened was the beginning of it all. The express roared through and she got a cinder in her eye; she went back into the buffet and he said, "I happen to be a doctor," and he got it out for her.

Olympia's eyes are on the floor, waiting for Spalanzani to pick them up and throw them at Nathanael, who has just burst in. Coppola is hot-footing it through the other door with Olympia over his shoulder, *sans* eyes of course. Nathanael is upset. It was Coppola who sold him the spyglass which he used to watch Olympia's room. He didn't know he had danced with such a doll. This is the end of *Casanova*. Outside the cinema it's pouring with rain, pissing down. I had a friend who was driving through a strange town in a rainstorm. He needed to pee, so he stopped the car when he saw a public convenience. It was pissing it down, so he dashed across the road and ran straight into the Ladies.

Trevor Howard runs into Celia Johnson while she's out shopping and they go and have some tea together, and then they go to the pictures. But most of the time they are at the station and a train is always about to come in, either hers or his. They're always having to go, on different trains. He's closing the door behind him, standing up now. She's closing the door behind her and sitting down. And she's looking out of the window and dreaming. It's this phantasy about being young and free and together and they're in Venice, except she realizes it's just the canal with the willows near where she lives, and this is where she has to get off. Back to her husband and child. Love for





Women reap no advantage from [their submission by/to a culture which oppresses them; uses them, cashes in on them] except that of their quasi-monopoly of masochistic pleasure, housework, and reproduction.⁵

Even given what masochistic perversion owes to masculine invention, is it safe to conclude that the masochism of the woman is a fantasy of the desire of the man?⁶

Psychoanalytic literature, as well as popular culture in a displaced manner, maintain that the girl suffers deprivation at the mother's hand; an imaginary castration (extracted of this desire). (Although, surely, there is no lack of desire in the relation at hand.) But the arms held out to her, inviting her entry into and identification with this maternal place/position, could be seen to be his arms.

"The sexual function is only assured precisely by the passage through the castration complex, castration indeed being first located in the mother, whose lack in desiring is what throws the child onto the law of the father."⁷ The girl attempts to complete the mother, satisfy her desire for the phallus, present her with just the gift she's always needed. But as this gift is one given jointly with the father's approval, the girl is mandated to stop this side of the law, to avoid the intimations of incest which would transgress its bounds. She makes the gift in order to facilitate an identification with him under the guise of preparing her place as mother.

She remains within the arms of the law, playing the pre-Oedipal mother, the mother whose castration—like a bad dream—is disavowed.⁸ His dream girl—suspended in/by this dream, the girl is fixed: the mother's absence is both deferred and demanded for the closure to be reenacted. Does this imaginary mother make the place of the "real" mother untenable, too painful, impossible?⁹ While sexuality in general is attained by a treacherous, "unnatural" route, we have been told (by

Freud, by Lacan, by others) that femininity is an impossible condition, a masquerade at best. Paradoxical as this formulation might seem, I would say that it is in order to be the phallus, that is to say, the signifier of the desire of the Other, that the woman will reject an essential part of her femininity, notably all its attributes through masquerade. It is for what she is not that she expects to be desired as well as loved.¹⁰ Lacan's woman rejects an essential part of her femininity and here I also risk essentialism by inscribing the wish for a "possible" femininity, but it is for a femininity that stops short of the woman beneath the masquerade who is loved/desired for what she really is. Perhaps femininity is categorically impossible because the woman must desire that of which she would never have any part—the penis—in order to fit a phallic order. Unattainability is the mark of desire, and the phallus is an abstracted "signifier of desire" (Lacan)—this is a *theoretically* radical formulation. But this object of desire has a tangible, disarming hold on the woman. Its presence is only too keenly felt.

If to gain access to femininity the girl must pass through the Oedipal ritual—achieve the impossible (re)solution of this complex—and emerge at the other end with her (dis)attachments secured (the father as new-found love, the mother—previous love object—now spurned, scorned for her lack), could not hysteria be projected as the most likely end of this process for the woman?¹¹ The girl performs a masculine identification whether her identification with the mother is problematic or not. She fits the definition of a phallic order, she identifies with the spurned object and thus takes up his arms.

The resolution of the Oedipus complex in the end demands the incorporation of a myth of the secure, whole subject, founded on the denial of the m/other's sex (although purportedly accepting the "fact" of castration). The hysteric somatizes her ambivalent rejection of the mother; in her, the repressed finds utterance, the body speaks. But it is a presumption to assume that her body is heard. The solution of the

mother problem creates the problem daughter, the difficult woman. Historically, hysteria has been registered, categorized, allowed to perform, but gagged when its discourse has been dangerously anti-phallogocentric.

The hysteric is the site of a problematized femininity and maternity. She fantasizes a penis, thereby finding a form of access to the phallus. She is the daughter who acts out... the desire of/for the mother, straining to embody that which culture demands as the solution to her inadequate anatomy. She is also the daughter who decries the possibility and desirability of that position.

But in all of this, hysteria included, the woman is constructed out of a masculine desire that she figure, symbolize the difficulty of the accession of the subject to sexuality. This is the rationale for her lack (in desiring). She takes the rap, does time as the embodiment of the dark continent, civilized only by the master's patronizing will to illuminate her in his name. Woman is truly the divided subject: she contains the polarities of femininity essential to a unified (mainly Westernized) patriarchal order. Her pleasure is pirated, her sexuality speaks softly. She is the image of artifice, barely visible in her naturalness.

Thus far, I have made woman out to be w/holy vulnerable, subject in but also to the role of mother, both as her potential position and as a parental potentate. I do this out of a wish to avoid projecting positive figurations of woman. Pro-figurations are no more than projected ideals, identifying familiar feminine polarities, the creation of yet another woman. Society consumes both the good girl and the bad girl. But somewhere between these two polarities, space must be made for criticality, for the radicality of a position which is not impossible, which does not re-define the feminine as such, but ceaselessly questions its cultural determinants, its parasitic pleasures, the boundless representations that act to constrict femininity into a convenient unempoweredness, an inability to measure up.

NOTES

1. Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One," in *New French Feminisms*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), p. 101. This and the following quotations are in no way meant to stand for the body of Irigaray's writings, which is certainly more complex than several severed quotations could represent. For her translated writings, see also, "When the Goods Get Together," in *New French Feminisms*, pp. 107-110. For some analyses of her writings, see Shoshana Felman, "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy," *Diacritics* 5 (Winter 1975); Josette Féral, "Antigone or The Irony of the Tribe," *Diacritics* 8 (Fall 1978); Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982).

2. Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One," p. 100. I "appropriate" fragments of Irigaray's text. I wrest them from the context of her argument and insert them into another context, to "penetrate," "force open" a different critique—to rupture the "mystery" of my *she*.

3. See translator's comment (Jacqueline Rose) in Jacques Lacan, "The Phallic Phase and the Subjective Import of the Castration Complex," in *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1982), p. 100.

4. Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One," p. 104. The whole paragraph reads: "But if the female imaginary happened to unfold, if it happened to come into play other than as pieces, scraps, deprived of their assemblage, would it present itself for all that as a universe? Would it indeed be volume rather than surface? No. Unless female imaginary is taken to mean, once again, the prerogative of the maternal over the female. This maternal would be phallic in nature however, closed in upon the jealous possession of its valuable product and competing with man in his esteem for surplus. In this race for power, woman loses the uniqueness of her pleasure. By diminishing herself in volume, she renounces the pleasure derived from the nonsuture of her lips: she is a mother certainly, but she is a virgin mother. Mythology long ago assigned this role to her in which she is allowed a certain social power as long as she is reduced, with her own complicity, to sexual impotence."

5. Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One," p. 105.

6. Lacan, "Guiding Remarks for a Congress on Feminine Sexuality," in *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 92.

7. Lacan, "The Phallic Phase and the Subjective Import of the Castration Complex," p. 114. (I could be taken to task for showing just snatches of discourse. My use of contextless quotations makes me an infidel, at the very least unfair, to the text. This is an academic point. I confess to resorting to an instrumentality that remains faithful to a "different"—albeit psychoanalytical—reading of woman, and betrays my position throughout. The quotation marks do not frame the reader as much as they mark out a field of argument.)

8. See Elizabeth L. Berg, "The Third Woman," *Diacritics* 12 (Summer 1982), for a view of the position of the phallic mother, developed around a critique of the writings of Irigaray and Sarah Kofman, as one of resistance. "In the long run it is the phallic mother who is the most threatening figure for everyone, since she possesses what she is not supposed to possess." Berg draws parallels between feminine multiplicity, a radical bisexuality, and the phallic mother, who is "not a fantasm to be dismissed, or simply the product of the child's imagination; she is the reality of the woman who is beyond the 'truth' of castration." My reservations about this position concern the risk involved in accepting, even appropriating, a phallic economy, the "fact" of castration, in order to refute it through simultaneous acceptance and denial. Whether the woman is then beyond the truth of castration or caught within its web is questionable.

9. This distinction between the "imaginary" mother and the "real" mother represents a conflict, but never really a distinct polarity.

10. Lacan, "The Meaning of the Phallus," in *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 84. The most radical, useful aspect of Freudian and Lacanian theory has precisely been its insistence on a constructed, non-given sexuality.

11. This resolution is in fact equivalent to Freud's notion that the girl never resolves her Oedipal complex. Her motivation to do so should be the threat of castration, as it is for the boy. But it is the girl's recognition of her mother's and thus her own "castration" that turns her away from the mother whom she blames, and redirects her libido onto the father. In this, she is left short, settles on/for the father, and the familial circle is thus closed. She does not fear castration, she need only acknowledge its factuality. "In boys, the Oedipus Complex is destroyed by the Castration complex, in girls it is made possible and led up to by the Castration complex" (Lacan, quoting Freud, in *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 103). Thus, her irresolution. For Lacan and Lacanians, this formulation remains fundamentally legitimate; arguments attempting to

make a clean break between symbol and organ (phallus and penis) beg the issue of difference. Even though there is "nothing missing in the real" of the woman (Lacan), the primacy of the phallus symbolizing function is insufficiently questioned, the Law of the Father is largely uninterrogated, and the woman—abstracted from her inevitable body—exists as a radical nondefinition, but within a familiar phallic economy.