

It has not been unusual in traditions of radical and socialist thought for the problematic of emancipation to be formulated in terms of "equality." Yet it has become clear over the course of the modern period that "equality" is an ideological concept, perpetuating in a mystified form elements of the system of domination, and helping that system adapt to the requirements of mass society, with its technobureaucratic structures and its culture of commodity consumption. Should we not therefore be suspicious when we are presented with a concept like "sexual equality"? This is particularly true if we are concerned about the loss of individuality and cultural diversity in mass society, and counterpose to the dominant institutions a vision of unity-in-diversity. I would like, therefore, to examine the implications of the goal of "sexual equality," and to propose that a sexual politics of unity-in-difference be substituted for sexual egalitarianism. On behalf of this project, I would now like to do three things: first, to show the way in which sexual egalitarianism may suppress difference, misconceive of difference, and neutralize difference; secondly, to discuss the significance of difference in relation to the tradition of domination and its recent transformations; and, finally, to sketch in only the most rudimentary form some aspects of an ideal of unity-in-difference based on an androgynous conception of subjectivity.

Perhaps the best known and most revealing argument for sexuality equality is presented by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir contends in this classic work that the emancipation of women depends on the achievement of "complete economic and social equality, which will bring about an inner metamorphosis." (SS,811 "la parfaite egalite economique et sociale, ce qui entrainera une metamorphose interieure" II,574) This metamorphosis is found to take place at the level of subjectivity, so that a certain sameness of being issues in a certain sameness of liberty, of self-determination. De Beauvoir cautions that we should not fear this sameness, and cling to the difference of domination, a dominating difference. We must remember, for example, that "doing away with the slave trade meant death to the great plantations, magnificent with azalias and camelias..." (Ibid. "en supprimant les marches d'esclaves, on a assassine les grandes plantations si magnifiquement parees d'azalees et de camelias" Ibid.) Reaction has always impeded progress through appeals to "philistine sentimentalism." Conquering this fear of loss of difference, we hasten our "arrival" in the realm of sameness and equality.

It turns out that the path to this sameness and equality is itself a path of sameness (though, as we shall see, a recognition of difference persists). "If the little girl were brought up from the first with the same demands and rewards, the same severity and the same freedom, as her

brothers, taking part in the same studies, the same games, promised the same future, surrounded by men and women who seemed to her undoubted equals, the meanings of the castration complex and the oedipus complex would be profoundly modified." (807 "Si des l'age le plus tendre, la filette etait elevee avec les memes exigences et les memes honneurs, les memes severites et les memes licenses que ses freres, participant aux memes etudes, aux memes jeux, promise a un meme avenir, entouree de femmes et d'hommes qui lui apparaitraient sans equivoque comme des egaux, le sens du 'complexe de castration' et du 'complexe d'Oedipe' seraient profondement modifies." II, 570) Modified, not surprisingly, in the direction of sameness. The two parents having the same "material and moral responsibilities," ("au meme titre...la responsabilite materielle et morale" II, 570-571) their "prestige" becomes, of course, the same. Ideas of inferiority and superiority wither away. No longer is the female child "oriented toward passivity," but rather, like the male, she becomes "interested in what she was doing" and will "throw herself without reserve into undertakings." (807-808 "elle ne s'orienterait pas vers la passivite....elle s'interesserait a ce qu'elle fait, elle s'engagerait sans reticence dans ses entreprises." II, 571) The young woman becomes, in the most essential and existential sense, like the young man.

Not surprisingly, de Beauvoir asserts that what is no longer "perceived" ("senti") in this realm of sameness is a "masculine world." And, indeed, on the assumption that all significant feminine difference disappears (and that, as all can agree, "biological facts" have "in themselves...no significance" (ils ne portent pas en eux-memes leurs sens" DS, I:73)) there could, in principle, hardly be anything capable of definition as a "masculine world." Yet it is surprising that de Beauvoir defines the resulting realm of sameness as "an androgynous world." ("un monde androgyne") Surprising in view of her suppression of any significant dimensions of subjectivity that could be conceived of according to any masculine/feminine polarity, dimensions which would allow "worldhood" to be constituted in any meaningful "androgynous" sense. For what possible meaning can an "androgynous world" have in the absence of an androgynous subject living that world? And what elements of androgyny remain for de Beauvoir's subject?

De Beauvoir is certainly not oblivious to the problem of difference, and her thought, which always retains a certain dialectical element, a certain complexity, must be distinguished from vulgar forms of liberal and socialist equalitarianism. Thus, she rejects the simplistic, ahistorical view that both men and women should simply "be regarded as human beings," a position that resorts to vacuous abstraction, ignoring the concreteness of situation. (SS, xvi "consideres comme des etres humains" DS, I:12)

Furthermore, she admits that there may even be a transhistorical basis for difference. "(T)here will always be certain differences between man and woman; her eroticism, and therefore her sexual world, have a special form of their own and therefore cannot fail to engender a sensuality, a sensitivity, of a special nature. This means that her relations to her own body, to that of the male, to the child, will never be identical with those the male bears to his own body, to that of the female, and to the child..."

(SS, 813 "il demeurera toujours entre l'homme et la femme certaines differences; son erotisme, donc son monde sexuel, ayant une figure singuliere ne saurait manquer d'engendre chez elle une sensualite, une sensibilite singuliere: ses rapports a son corps, au corps male, a l'enfant ne seront jamais identique a ceux que l'homme soutient avec son corps, avec le corps feminin et avec l'enfant..." DS, II:575-576)

But what of this difference? We might ask of de Beauvoir what Derrida asks of Heidegger, "What if 'sexuality' already marked the most originary Selbstheit?"

If so, then according to her account of the nature of being human, of being pour soi, this being can have only one sexuality, and it is not an androgynous one. De Beauvoir's subject, it turns out, is a masculine, and, indeed, a Promethian being who defines himself through striving, activity, and achievement. "Every subject plays his part as such specifically through exploits or projects that serve as a mode of transcendence; he achieves liberty only through a

continual reaching out toward other liberties. There is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into an indefinitely open future." (SS, xxxiii "Tout sujet se pose concretement a travers des projets comme une transcendence; il n'accomplit sa liberte que par son perpetuel depassement vers d'autres libertes; il n'y a d'autre justification de l'existence present que son expansion vers un avenir indefiniment ouvert." DS, I:31)

The ascent to transcendence does indeed "profoundly alter" castration, for a same guilt is rendered universal. One is certainly under this regime "condemned to be free," as freedom becomes the "project" of justifying ones existence before the law. Ones fate is at once a life sentence and a death sentence.

De Beauvoir's problematic of sexual equality fails to overcome the dualisms traceable in large part to the patriarchal heritage of civilization. It may indeed be true, as de Beauvoir contends, that the categories of Self and Other (or, as she also phrases it, the Same, "le Mem are inescapable elements of human consciousness. Yet one must question the validity of her Hegelian psychology, which posits as a universal aspect of subjectivity "a fundamental hostility toward every other consciousness," and claims that "the subject can be posed only in being opposed--he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object." (SS, xx "dans la conscience elle-meme une fondamentale hostilite a l'egard de toute

autre conscience; le sujet ne se pose qu'en s'opposant: il pretent s'affirmer comme l'essentiel et constituer l'autre en inessentiel, en objet" DS,I:17) This formulation is, of course, quite coherent, to varying degrees, in regard to certain dominant and dominating forms of subjectivity appearing throughout the history of civilization. Yet it seems quite incoherent in relation to many other forms of subjectivity, for example, the "primitive," numerous sorts of social and psychological marginality, and, not least of all, the feminine.

But another dualism which is even more primordial than the self-other dualism is preserved in de Beauvoir's egalitarian feminism. This is the dualism within the subject: the mind-body dualism. According to de Beauvoir, one of the great advantages of males in their monopoly on "transcendence" over the ages is their success in transcending their own bodies, a success aided materially by nature "herself." Women, on the other hand, have been condemned to be at the mercy of their bodies: by nature woman's life is "less rich than man's." (SS, 38 "sa vie individuelle est moins riche que celle de l'homme" DS, I, 73) Women suffer from weakness, instability, lack of control, and fragility. "These are facts." (Ibid. "ce sont des faits" Ibid.) Yet de Beauvoir's facts are colored by judgments, negative judgments concerning woman's corporeal nature. As Jean Elshtain has remarked, in de Beauvoir's account of the feminine and the female, "the fetus is characterized as a 'tenant,' a parasite upon the mother's existence. Menstruation is horrific and disgusting. Nursing merely exhausts the mother--de Beauvoir nowhere acknowledges that it, or any other female reproductive or nurturant activity, can have meaning or profound emotional importance to and for the subject herself." (PMPW, 309) The imaginary significance given to the seemingly "factual" has far-reaching implications.

The achievement of transcendence for women means escape from the limitations of the body and the attainment of the



active life previously reserved to males. The world into which they have gained entry is (despite the persistence of certain inessential differences "of a special nature") not androgynous, but rather masculine. A world that has a place for the "modern woman" who "accepts masculine values: she prides herself on thinking, taking action, working, creating, on the same terms as men...." (SS,798. "elle se pique de penser, agir, travailler, creer au meme titre que les males.....elle affirme qu'elle s'egale a eux." DS, II,562). A world in which this sameness of activity is only threatened "so long as femininity is perpetuated as such," thus allowing the sexes to use difference in their struggles against one another. (SS,799 "tant que les hommes et les femmes ne se reconnaîtront pas comme des semblables, c'est-a-dire tant que se perpetuera la femininite en tant que telle" DS,II, 563).

Finally, there will be a transcendence of nature by culture, and with it a transcendence of those aspects of difference which are presumably the residue of untranscended nature. The truth of human sexual relationships thus is allowed to reveal itself--as de Beauvoir puts it, "the human couple will find its true form." (SS, 814. "le couple humain trouvera sa vrai figure" DS,II, 576) And this true form, manifesting itself in the movement beyond natural difference (Ibid. "par dela leurs differenciations naturelles" DS, II 577) is, as de Beauvoir says in her "final word," "brotherhood." (Ibid. "fraternite" Ibid.)

De Beauvoir's egalitarianism illustrates strikingly how liberal and socialist thought can perpetuate, in the most "emancipatory" guise, important aspects of the dominant ("phallogocentric") tradition. As Irigaray notes, the "domination of the philosophic logos stems in large part from its power to reduce all others to the economy of the same," and perhaps most importantly, "from its power to eradicate the difference between the sexes in systems that are self-representative of a 'masculine subject.'" (TS, 74) Under this system, a putative heterosexuality has been "an alibi" to disguise the workings of what she calls "hom(m)o-sexuality": "man's relations with himself, of relations among men." (TS 172) Her case for the overwhelming dominance of this system over Western thought from Plato to Freud is brilliantly stated (if overstated) in *Speculum of the Other Woman*.

Irigaray calls for the recognition of difference, and of long suppressed or ignored aspects of feminine experience that threaten the system of domination. Such as that described in "La Mystérique," which directs us to a realm where "consciousness is no longer master," ("la conscience ...ne se maitrise plus" SAF, 238) where it forsakes its path of conquest, of strivings and "projects" in favor of a path of "jouissance." In such experience the hostility between subject and Other, as described by de Beauvoir, breaks down, as "one term mingles into another." (SQW, 191 "effusion... dans un embras(s)ment qui les confond comme termes" SAF,

238) This experience doubly threatens the sovereign ego, on the one hand by revealing it as empty and void, and on the other by overstepping its bounds, or whatever bounds we seek to establish for it. For "the 'I' is empty still, ever more empty, opening wide in rapture of soul." (SOW 195 Perhaps more clearly in the original: "Vide encore, et toujours plus, epanoui dans des transports qui dilatent l'ame." SAF, 243)

But it is not only in mystical or hysterical experience, but also in more ordinary modes of being that the feminine threatens the integrity of the dominant subject. For to the extent that woman herself has escaped determination by the masculine imaginary (outside the history of domination rather than merely in the history of dominant ideas) she has escaped the hierarchical channeling of desire, and thus remained open to difference. "(T)he geography of her pleasure is far more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is commonly imagined--in an imaginary rather too narrowly focused on sameness." (TS 28) For Irigaray (and here it becomes evident that she speaks of a certain feminine, a certain woman) "ownership and property are doubtless quite foreign to the feminine. At least sexually." (TS 31) For she does not take possession, the other is not alien, but rather "so near that she cannot have it or have herself." (Ibid.) As a result, all speculation, all economies of possession, of accumulation are placed in question.

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Irigaray attempts to avoid interpreting this "feminine" or this "woman" as a universal essence, as a natural or historical condition to which they can be reduced, and which defines them as an identity. Woman does not have simple location in the feminine, she "must reach the place where she takes pleasure as woman." The path to this place may require "a long detour by way of analysis of the various systems of oppression," and a "process of going back through a social practice that her enjoyment requires." (TS 31) In recovering liberatory experience such as that of "La Mysterique," one finds that this feminine experience is not limited to the female. It is "the place where 'she,'" and "in some cases he" speaks, "if he follows 'her' lead." The word "her" placed in quotes to indicate that this is not a question of any particular female, or all of them, but rather of that feminine that oversteps boundaries of determinate subjects and determinate sexes. (SOW, 191. And in the French, there is no talk of "leading," but rather "recours," implying a refuge, or perhaps more primordially, a flowing back to a source. "Lieu ou 'elle' parle--ou lui mais par recours a 'elle'" SAF, 238. 'Elle' entre guillemets puisque ce n'est pas question d'un ego femelle, mais plutot de cette feminine qui deborde toute limite de sujet determine, meme de sexe determine.)

Neither "woman" nor "the feminine" are reducable to any form of identity. "Woman is not to be related to any simple designatable being, subject, or entity," nor is their any

"generic entity: woman." (SOW, 230 La femme "ne se peut rapporter a un etre, a un sujet, a un tout, simplement designable." Et il n'y a pas "quelque generique: la femme." SAF, 285) Furthermore, a "femininity that conforms and corresponds too exactly to an idea--Idea--of woman...has already frozen into phallogorphism." (SOW, 229 "une femininite trop adequate, trop conforme a une idee--Idee--de la femme...s'est deja figee dans le phallogorphisme." SAF, 284) So "femininity" always escapes reduction either to determinations of nature or those of culture. In its openness to difference it challenges the dominant subjectivity, which embodies in its structures the heritage of domination (though, as will be discussed, this tradition is itself in a process of self-destructuration and self-destruction; however, Irigaray has little to say about this).

But Irigaray, having announced the non-establishment, the non-foundation of the feminine, falls, or begins to fall, into the trap of positing the kind of determination she had presumably rejected. For at times she describes a "femininity" that seems founded on a biological and psychologistic basis, on sexual identity, on the exclusion of the male, and, implicitly, on the non-recognition of androgyny.

As L. Godard has remarked, Irigaray, in her description of masculine and feminine sexuality (which are intimately related to all dimensions of character and sensibility, including "écriture" in the widest sense), falls back on the most specific physiological determinations. (P, 162. Elle "prend appui sur de tres precises determinations physiologiques") Thus, she claims that "woman's autoeroticism is very different from man's. In order to touch himself, man needs an instrument: his hand, a woman's body, language... And this self-carressing requires at least a minimum of activity. As for woman, she touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation, and before there is any way to distinguish activity from passivity. Woman 'touches herself' all the time, and, moreover, no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two--but not divisible into one(s)--that caress each other." (TS, 24. "l'autoerotism de la femme est-il tres different de celui de l'homme. Celui-ci a besoin d'un instrument pour se toucher: sa main, le sexe de la femme, le langage... Et cette auto-affection exige un minimum d'activite. La femme, elle, se touche d'elle meme et en elle-meme sans la necessite d'une mediation, et avant tout departage possible entre activite et passivite. La femme 'se touche' tout le temps, sans que l'on puisse d'ailleurs le lui interdire, car son sexe est fait de deux levres qui s'embrassent continument. Ainsi, en elle, elle est deja

deux--mais non divisibles en un(e)s--qui s'affectent." CS, 24.) Irigaray goes on to describe the "violent," "brutal," "separating" activity of the male, who destroys feminine eroticism through "intrusion." (TS, 24) A discussion not without ambiguity, but which resonates with echos of "anatomy is destiny."

Yet there remains an indecidability in the text, offering the possibility of a more generous reading than Godard's. For Irigaray states that it is "Western sexuality" with which she is dealing. Therefore it is possible (despite the universalizing, essentializing tendencies in the text) to interpret these statements of "what is" and "what is necessary" as conditions of existence and exigency determined not only and merely by biology, but also by culture and imagination. So that even if one concedes that there are biologically determined dispositions, possibilities, and even limitations, which will always play a part in the nature of feminine or masculine sensibility and experience, this will not of itself explain the nature of the existing forms. Nor will the acceptance of some such differences as inevitable necessarily imply any continued opposition between the feminine and the masculine. There is no sex that "is" one.

Derrida delineates in an even more uncompromising manner the far-reaching implications of feminine difference. More uncompromising, since his discussion is without any hint of positivism and reductionism; indeed his pursuit of "differance" aims at the destruction of any such tendencies. According to Derrida, it was Nietzsche who finally apprehended the significance of the feminine for the Western metaphysical tradition. (Though there is no one "woman" or "feminine" in Nietzsche's thinking. See S/E 96-97 for the three "propositions" on woman). It was he who, almost alone among the philosophers, grasped the sense in which woman had escaped a nihilistic will to power that has been the secret of the modern age, of enlightenment, of disenchantment. As he writes in *The Gay Science*, "When a man stands in the midst of his own noise, in the midst of his own surf of plans and projects, then he is apt also to see quiet, magical beings gliding past them and to long for their happiness and seclusion: women. He almost thinks that his better self dwells there among the women, and that in these quietest regions even the loudest surf turns into deathly quiet, and life itself into a dream about life." (GS 124. "Lorsqu'un homme en proie a son propre tumulte (Larm) se trouve au milieu du ressac (Brandung, encore) de ses 'jets' et projets (Wurfen und Entwurfen): sans doute voit-il alors aussi des etres enchanteurs et silencieux glisser devant lui, dont il convoite la felicite et la retraite (Zuruckgezogenheit: le repli en soi)--ce sont les femmes (es



sind die Frauen). Il aime a croire que la-bas, aupres des femmes, habiterait son meilleur moi (sein besseres Selbst): a ces places tranquilles le plus violent tumulte (Brandung) s'apaiserait en un silence de mort (Totenstille) et la vie deviendrait le reve meme de la vie (uber das Leben)." S/E 44.)

The existence of this feminine challenges the dominance of that ever-striving ego that seeks satisfaction in its heroic "projects," but can never find it through its quest for power over all, over all as other to be appropriated. De Beauvoir never adequately explains why the male who has presumably reached the truly human condition of transcendence still longs, albeit secretly, for the despised feminine immanence. "In woman," she says, "is incarnated in positive form the lack that the existent carries in his heart, and it is in seeking to be made whole through her that man hopes to attain self-realization." (SS, 160. "Dans la femme s'incarne positivement le manque que l'existant porte en son coeur, et c'est en cherchant a se rejoindre a travers elle que l'homme espere se realiser." DS, I, 234.) But how can the "abundance" of woman (based, in de Beauvoir's own view, on a dehumanizing reduction, a denial, in bad faith, of the highest aspects of woman's being) "incarnate," in any coherent sense, a "lack"? And, indeed, as she explains, it is not through woman or the feminine that de Beauvoir's subject finally seeks to find what is lacking, but in an endless, hopeless, phallic succession of

"jets" and "projets." A succession terminated only in death, and given impulse through the denial of death. But the tranquility of the feminine reminds him (this masculine subject) of the illusory nature of his escape. One is made whole through a return to the self, finding that self more complete and "better" than it has been judged to be according to that law regulating his projects. The lure of the feminine rests on the recognition of this possibility of wholeness. The feminine is thus not an "incarnation" of "lack" in the other, but rather the signification of the possibility of abolishing "lack" within the masculine self.

According to Nietzsche, it is the quality of the feminine "to act at a distance." (S/E, 47. "eine Wirkung in die Ferne, une operation a distance" S/E 46). As such, the feminine opposes itself to the kind of presence that has been demanded of all beings according to the tradition: availability for use, for development, for disposition according to projects. But as Derrida remarks, "perhaps woman--a non-identity, a non-figure, a simulacrum--is distance's very chasm, the out-distancing of distance, the interval's cadence, distance itself, if we could still say such a thing, distance itself." (S/E, 49. "Peut-etre est-elle, comme non-identite, non-figure, simulacre, l'abime de la difference, la coupe de l'espacement, la distance elle-meme si l'on pouvait encore dire, ce qui est impossible, la distance elle-meme." The play and much of the force of the point is lost in the translation:

"elle-meme" can never be said, it being impossible to thus link the feminine and sameness). The feminine is that which escapes instrumentalization both in history and in thought. Plato's receptacle that resists form. Aristotle's matter that escapes knowledge. And a long lineage of mystics, witches, poets, dreamers, utopians, and marginal beings who have lived outside the law.

The feminine is neither the essence of woman that has been been opposed to that of man, in order to dominate her, nor is it some other essence that purports to escape this domination. For the radical character of the feminine is to deny reduction to essence: to a truth which can be grasped, possessed, accumulated, utilized. "There is no such thing as the essence of woman because woman averts, she is averted of herself. Out of the depths, endless and unfathomable, she engulfs and distorts all vestiges of essentiality, of identity, of property." (S/E, 51. "Il n'y a pas d'essence de la femme parce que la femme ecarte et s'ecarte d'elle-meme. Elle engloutit, envoile par le fond, sans fin, sans fond, toute essentiality, toute identite, toute propriete.") Woman diverges, digresses, transgresses. She goes off the path--whatever path may be dictated to her. She even diverges from the path of herself (elle-meme), that is, any self that is defined for her as her essence. In this way, woman is untruth. But in a corresponding way, truth is woman. "Woman is but one name for that untruth of truth." (S/E, 51. "Femme est un nom de cette non-verite de

la verite" S/E , 50. As Derrida notes, Nietzsche's "anti-feminism" consisted of a rejection of the incorporation of women into the masculine imaginary founded on lack, striving, and the appropriation of the object. Or, as Derrida formulates it, the desire of a woman "to lay claim...to truth, science and objectivity in all their castrated delusions of virility." (S/E, 65. "revendiquant la verite, la science, l'objectivite, c'est-a-dire avec toute illusion virile, l'effet de castration qui s'y attache." S/E, 64.)

While Nietzsche (or, at least, Derrida's selection of a Nietzsche) is insistent on behalf of the claims of difference and the feminine, his defense (despite its critical force) lacks a certain positive moment. This is inevitable, given the inherited images of the feminine that Nietzsche in a sense merely takes up, no matter how radical his purposes. Yet it is possible to combine such an openness to the reality of difference with a more emancipatory vision of differentiated subjectivity.

Cixous does exactly this in her exploration of the possibilities opened through the liberation of difference within subjectivity, once masculinity and femininity have been diverted (detourne) from the tradition of domination which has shaped them according to its ends. She expresses a utopian hope that a kind of consciousness of difference can exist which will overturn the logic of appropriation. The phallogentric scheme of recognition requires a difference allied with a hierarchical inequality, an inequality in which the subject gains "Imaginary profit," and "Imaginary victory" through possession of the object. (NBW, 79) Cixous opposes to this Hegelian formulation the possibility of mutual recognition, in which the difference of the other is not negated. In which otherness is not conceived of in terms of objectification, opposition, or hostility, but is instead granted value in itself, and permitted to reveal itself. Rather than reliving the perennially repeated (but not inevitable) symbolic struggles

of subject and object, the subject thus takes the path of "non-action" (that is, non-dominating action), finding in the other "the unknown that is there to discover, to respect, to favor, to cherish." (NBW, 78)

This openness to the other also implies an openness to the diversity, the sexual difference, within oneself. Whatever biological differences may exist transhistorically, and whatever cultural differences may have been determined historically, there is no difference which divides itself discretely or discreetly along lines of sex and sexuality. The universal bisexuality recognized by Freud will have an entirely different meaning when it is no longer subordinated to the demands of an economy of domination and appropriation (for example, organized Oedipally). The feminine has taken on a liberatory character in part because under the regime of domination it has been allowed to retain a greater bisexual and androgynous component (given the relegation of feelings to the feminine realm, the greater "indulgence" given to the "weak" and inferior, and limited approval given to the emulation of the "higher" by the "lower"—a non-reciprocal relation). Yet androgyny is not limited to woman. As Cixous points out, the self-mutilation deriving from the denial of androgyny has also been at the expense of men: "men's loss in phallocentrism is different from but as serious as women's." (NBW, 83). Androgyny means openness to the uniqueness of personality of each subject, to the diversity negated in the channeling of desire according to

the master-plan (strategie d'ensemble) of the economy of domination.

There is no way to determine in advance the direction of evolution of the "masculine" and the "feminine" made possible through such liberation of desire. As Cixous claims, "the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes" is "evident and insistent in different ways according to the individual." (NBW, 85) Thus, there can be no norm or essence of androgyny to set up as a new law. While androgyny means openness to diversity and difference, there can be no "quota system" specifying how this diversity is to manifest itself (for are not all forms of equality repressive?).

It is difficult even to imagine the forms the concepts of "masculine" and "feminine" might take after they are disintangled from the values of hierarchy and domination. What is "given" is the irreducible reality of some biological and psychological difference (which must be recognized as a determining factor, if an implausible cultural idealism is to be avoided), and the ambiguous heritage of historically determined difference (the imaginary as a material force, in constant process of self-transformation). In short, "nature" and "culture." The question remains, what will be done with these "givens." How will they be "taken?" What significance will they be given in an imaginary which is not oriented toward

appropriation, but is, rather, opened to the diversity of experience, to the play of difference, and to creativity?



But there are other excellent questions that have hardly begun to be asked. The most radical currents in feminist theory have succeeded in subjecting the masculine imaginary, especially as it has been reflected in Western thought from Plato to Freud, to a thorough critique. This project has been based on certain assumptions about the nature of the masculine, dominating subject. This subject is said to be organized according to certain relations of power, expressed in the concepts of Oedipus, castration, and the Patriarchal Law. Masculine character structure is described as rigid and hierarchical, the imaginary is explained to be focused on a problematic of accumulation and profit. All of which is quite valid, and captures a moment of the dominant subjectivity which is quite powerful even today. Yet it is not the only moment, and to take it as the exclusive object of critique prevents an adequate grasp of the dynamics of contemporary culture.

No analysis of cultural phenomena can overlook the increasing predominance of the consumptionist moment of modern economic society, nor ignore its significance for sexual difference. Granted that this society depends on a dialectic between the productivist and consumptionist sectors (both institutional and ideological), during the course of social evolution the relative importance of these sectors is in a state of constant change. Thus, during the period of "early capitalism," the stage of accumulation, productivist institutions and corresponding ideological

forms predominated. One of the most striking developments in "late capitalism" is the vast expansion of consumptionist institutions and of the ideology of commodity consumption. Accordingly, there has been a dramatic change in the nature of subjectivity, of "character structure," and of the imaginary. One of the most salient features of this social and psychological mutation has been a process of destructuring, which has accelerated as contradictions between institutional structures have intensified, and the more rigid structures of the productivist institutions have come under increasing pressure from the growing consumptionist sector. A development only comprehensible in relation to the parallel phenomenon of the erosion of productivist character structures, which are under attack from conditioning processes that are increasingly consumptionist in nature. Late capitalism thus contains a deeply "post-structuralist" dimension.

What does this mean for the "masculine imaginary" and the "masculine subject" as these have been conceived of by many of their critics? In part, it means that the system of domination can dispense with rigidly productivist, "patriarchal" values, which henceforth appear increasingly "obsolete," and propose instead a consumptionism in which all can achieve "equality." But this "equality" is an ideological term disguising the status of being at once the consumer of commodities and the commodity to be consumed.

In this context Irigaray's complaint about society denying woman's autoerotic pleasure (TS, 26) seems a bit out of touch. For in the society of consumption this pleasure is not only permitted, but even enthusiastically promoted as a means toward the production of more commodities (self-help books, magazine articles, erotic films, ingenious sexual gadgets, an infinite variety of psychotherapies, etc.). Desire is propagated in a multitude of forms, so long as these forms can be assimilated into the consumptionist imaginary. Society cannot be understood as if the repressive mechanisms that were so perceptively (if ideologically) described by Freud early in this century remain somehow identically and ahistorically at work.

Yet the consumptionist imaginary is in fact a transformation of the dominant masculine imaginary. A relation which exists, regardless of the degree to which it is adopted or adapted by women. It is a transformation in that an always-present narcissistic dimension has become preeminent, and has had far-reaching implications for the deconstructing and restructuring of subjectivity. Cixous' comments on "phallogentric narcissism" are revealing in relation to this development. According to her, the "traditional man" wants above all to "gain more masculinity: plus-value of virility, authority, power, money, or pleasure." (NBW, 87) But this is a rather uncritical listing, and overlooks the distinction between the primordial and the epochal, the primary and the secondary.

But we may set aside the question of the primordial (Freud's undecidable question in BPP): whether it is pleasure, power, or something else. What is more interesting is that Cixous puts her finger on some particularly salient features of the masculine imaginary as it appears in the present epoch, and which are relevant to its present movement of self-transcendence and self-disguising.

Cixous correctly notes the obsession with self-image, and the importance of mirroring. Masculine narcissism is "self-absorbed," obsessed with "making sure of its image, of being seen, of seeing itself, of assembling its glories, of pocketing itself again. The reductive look, the always divided look returning, the mirror economy: he needs to love himself." (NBW, 94) The nature of this imaginary can only be grasped through the most concrete analysis of its foundation in the evolution of the culture of commodity consumption, and of the transformation of personal and institutional relations as that culture strives for hegemony. And what one finds striking in the course of this investigation is the extent to which the "phallogocentric" or "masculine" imaginary comes to appear to be neither, the extent to which the hollowed-out narcissistic ego, incorporating a lack more radical even than "castration" (in which "something" lacks "something") achieves universality. Cixous rightly opposes to this consuming ego a feminine that still lives in a world and recognizes the other: "she launches forth; she seeks to love." (NBW, 94) But the

spiritual crisis of our time is that increasingly "she" is no more capable than is "he," of "launching forth" and "loving," as each looks around to find only a prison of mirroring walls.

There are thus two distortions of subjectivity to be avoided: both the traditional subject-object opposition based on a sadistic, hostile, appropriating imaginary, and the universalistic transcendence (Aufhebung) of this opposition in a narcissistic, consumptionist imaginary. If this can be accomplished, then perhaps we can recommence the development of the submerged, non-dominating tradition of unity-in-diversity expressed so well two and one-half millenia ago in the Tao te Ching, where the "phallogocentric" tradition (and, thus, civilization itself) was confronted with a thorough critique at its very beginnings. Indeed, this work presents us instead with an "androgynous" ontology from which we can draw much inspiration even today.

In the Taoist ontology, there is no hierarchical opposition between being and non-being. Existence is not oriented by means of the horror of a lack. There is no terror of non-being, since, the supreme reality itself, the Tao, is empty ("La Voie est vide" TTC, IV), while still lacking nothing in its maternal abundance. It is neither a self-identical One, a self-dependent substance, nor a self-evident principle. It seeks neither to totalize itself nor all else through itself. It is anarchic, surpassing all principles in its self-differentiation. The Tao is "vague"; it flows everywhere. ("la grande Voie est ambigue....Elle peut aller a gauche ou a droite." As the French translator notes, the term "ambigue" refers literally to water that

runs in all directions. "Le mot 'ambigue' au debut se dit litteralement de l'eau qui coule dans toutes les directions." TTC, XXXIV) It does not flow toward any end, including any end of history (though the flow of Tao is like the flow of water, which returns to the sea from which all emerges). "Reversion is the action of the Tao. Weakness is the function of the Tao." ("Le retour est le mouvement de la Voie. La faiblesse est la methode de la Voie." TTC, XL) Reversion, the way of weakness, means return and reciprocity, as opposed to the way of strength, which seeks to take without giving. The way of weakness is the way of self-restoring nature and life, while the way of strength is the path of self-destruction, whether this be physical or spiritual annihilation. "(T)he stiff and the hard are the companions of death. The tender and weak are companions of life." ("ce qui est dur et raide (forte) est un serviteur de la mort; ce qui est doux et faible est un serviteur de la vie." TTC, LXXVI.) For the subject, the path of strength requires a well-defined, well-defended self. A territorialized self with border guards, with a state machinery, a national defense, and national interest. It means the death of the organic self for the sake of the objectifying and self-objectifying ego founded on power and appropriation. But the way of nature, the Tao, means non-appropriation. The "non-action" of the Tao is non-egoistic, non-appropriating action. "It accomplishes its task, but does not claim credit for it." (More

strikingly in the French translation: "Quand un resultat est acheve, elle ne se l'approprie pas." TTC, XXXIV) The Tao produces "the ten thousand things," but "does not take possession of them." (La Voie et la Vertu "produisent, mais ne s'approprient pas; elles agissent, mais n'en tirent aucune assurance; elles font croitre, mais ne dirigent pas." TTC, LI)

In short, the Tao is associated with powers of being and acting freed from their subjection to ends of domination and appropriation. In attempting to express the meaning of this way for humanity, the Tao te Ching could find no better image than that of the feminine. Civilization was beginning on a path of destruction because certain social forms and forms of consciousness associated with the masculine were dominant. This was a masculine out of control, out of balance with its complement. Furthermore, it sought to deny the presence of its complement at its own core (failing to apprehend the universal interpenetration of opposites) thus creating within itself a lack. The cure to this imbalance is seen in the rejection of hierarchical dualism, in which such "masculine" values as being, unity, identity, action, strength, and appropriation are associated with the good and their opposites are despised. Instead, there must be a recognition of the relation of mutual dependence between being and non-being, unity and diversity, identity and difference, action and passion, strength and weakness, receiving and giving. "He who knows the male (active force)



and keeps to the female (the passive force or receptive element)/ Becomes the ravine of the world." ("Celui qui se reconnaît comme coq (symbole du masculin, de l'activité) mais se tient en poule (symbole du féminin, de la passivité) est le ravin du monde." TTC, XXVII) In each case, the rejected "feminine" aspect of the self, and indeed, of all of nature, must be given recognition.

And given the effects of the overwhelming dominance of the masculine, it appeared in the time of Lao Tzu, and it will necessarily appear for a long time to come, that the path of liberation will be a path (back) toward the feminine.