THE END/S OF WOMAN

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As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*[1]

With the disappearance of man, what happens to woman? Having only recently gained a voice *as* women, feminists are now confronted with the proposition that to speak as a woman is merely to reinscribe oneself within the logic of an androcentric epistemology, the very logic, in other words, which feminists have been trying to combat. The decentering of the subject advocated by Michel Foucault and other French theorists has moved us, apparently, beyond sexual identity, into a new landscape where men can be women and women men, and where subjects are simply proper nouns. But if the disappearance of 'man,' the dissolution of the sovereign Cartesian ego, ensures that "Men will no longer speak for mankind[, s]hould women, by implication, no longer, i.e. *never* speak as women?"[2] While writers like Foucault have provided women with the tools required to 'deconstruct' the systems of power that have oppressed them, doesn't the current eliding of sexual identity require from feminists a note of skepticism, a wariness that the new polemic does not simply reauthorize old injustices?

I: Subjects and Subjection

The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle.

Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*[3]

The question of identity, and hence of sexual identity, arises out of the general poststructuralist critique of humanism and Western metaphysics. In current theory, identity — individuality, subject-hood — is held to be a construct complicitous with certain modes of restrictive logic. What French theorists have been trying to do — writers like Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes — is to wear away the ontological ground which has traditionally accrued around the "I" of discourse, to question the self-presence of the speaking subject, to show how subjects *are spoken* rather than speak — that is, how they are constituted by a web of forces of which consciousness is the effect rather than the point of origin.

The most thoroughly historical critique of the subject, and perhaps the one most useful to feminists, is that of Michel Foucault. Though Foucault does not specifically pose the question of *sexual* identity, his work on the subject's historical constitution lays out the terms in which such a question might take form. Throughout his research, Foucault has been concerned to show how the individual is constituted "as effect and object of power, as effect and object of knowledge."[4] In a Foucauldian framework, then, the question of woman comes down to a question of knowledge and power.

In his analysis of penal reform in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault shows how "a refinement of power relations" in the nineteenth century helped foster the growth of those sciences known (aptly, feminists have noted) as "the sciences of man." At the center of these new sciences stood a new object of knowledge, the individual, invested through and through by the systems of power which had created it. Hence the recent vintage of "man": in Foucault's view, "individuality" is a social construction whose origins are traceable to the institution of a new technology of power. By creating new forms of knowledge, power constitutes its own objects; and the objects which power has thus constituted then become the elements of its own articulation. "It is a double process, then: an epistemological 'thaw' through a refinement of power relations; a multiplication of the effects of power through the formation and accumulation of new forms of knowledge" (*DP*,224). Thus the human sciences, which grew out of a web of power relations spanning everything from medicine, psychiatry and education to military training and penal reform, helped perpetuate those very relations by constituting the individual as a new object of knowledge.

Foucault's perspective on subject-hood, then, is decidedly polemical: to become subject means to be subjected. "We should try to grasp subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects" (*P/K*,97). The human sciences, by reordering our ways of knowing and focussing our attention on the individual, have made it possible for power to entrench itself more firmly into the social body. Foucault gives the example of the homosexual, who arose as 'a species' at the point where homosexuality was characterized

"less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility." — when, in other words, emphasis shifted from the act to the individual.[5] But it has been this very sort of shift, according to Foucault, through which individuality has been constituted. Around this new object arise new discourses — in the realm of medicine, psychiatry, criminology — and through them "power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourse, learning processes and everyday lives" (*P/K*,39).

But in Foucault's view it would be wrong to imagine that power simply acts *against* individuals, in the form of prohibition and oppression. On the contrary, "individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application" (*P/K*,97); in other words, power passes *through* individuals, using them to further its own ends. Thus the "I" which power and knowledge have jointly constituted is also the "eye" of power and knowledge, that which subjects everything to its normalizing, hierarchizing gaze. To become subject, then, also means to subject, to give priority to identity, to authorship, to ownership, to situate consciousness at the origin of truth while excluding everything that is different and 'other.'

It is this aspect of the subject which Foucault attacks in his critique of traditional historicism. In his preface to *The Order of Things*, Foucault dissociates himself from the "phenomenological approach" to history, that "which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity — which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness" (*OT*,xiv). The same technology of power which has created individuals as objects of knowledge also situates them as subjects of knowledge. This "sovereignty of the subject" has led to what Foucault calls "continuous history":

> Continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity; the promise that one day the subject — in the form of historical consciousness — will once again bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find in them what might be called his abode.[6]

Totalizing and totalitarian, continuous history, the history of "transcendental consciousness," strives to situate itself at the privileged source of truth, and so "to preserve, against all decenterings, the sovereignty of the subject, and the twin figures of anthropology and humanism" (*AK*,12).

Thus the subject emerges in Foucault's work as the nexus of certain

"mechanics of power" — as both effect and vehicle of power, as that which subjects and is subjected. Foucault's task has been to write a history without a subject, "to get rid of the subject itself" (*P/K*,117), and so to expose the complicities of knowledge and power which have led to the subject's historical constitution.

II: Foucault and Feminism

> Interviewer: Do you feel that your 'History of Sexuality' will advance the women's question? I have in mind what you say about the hysterisation and psychiatrisation of the female body.
> Foucault: There are [a] few ideas there, but only hesitant ones, not yet fully crystallised. It will be the discussion and criticism after each volume that will perhaps allow them to become clarified. But it is not up to me to lay down how the book should be used (*PK*,192).

Foucault's critique of humanism and of the subject offers obvious points of convergence with feminist interests. Throughout his work, Foucault has been concerned with marginal groups, the insane, the delinquent, the sexually perverse — groups which, like women, have been traditionally silenced by the powers-that-be, and excluded from the privileged realm of "truth." But truth, in Foucault's view, as the end point of knowledge, "is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it" (*P/K*,133) — thus those groups which are barred from it will always be forced to the margins of discourse. Women have traditionally occupied that margin, and the androcentric humanism which Foucault deconstructs — with its "universals," its canons, its privileging of (an overwhelmingly male) tradition — has certainly been one more link in a long history of women's oppression.

But a thoroughly Foucauldian analysis would have to proceed at the level of the "micro-techniques of power" through which woman has not only been silenced, but *constituted* as object of power and knowledge, much as delinquents, the insane, and the sexually perverse have become "species" which power has used for its own ends. What historical determinants have moulded what we understand by the term "woman"? What nexus have women occupied in the web of power relations within a given epistemé, what functions have they served? Foucault gives the example of how the creation and medicalisation of female sexuality served part of a larger strategy for the policing of families and populations.

> It is worth remembering that the first figure to be invested by the deployment of sexuality, one of the first to be 'sexualized,' was the

> 'idle' woman. She inhabited the outer edge of the "world," in which she always had to appear as a value, and of the family, where she was assigned a new destiny charged with conjugal and parental obligations (*HS*,121).

A Foucauldian history of women, then, would begin at the point where "woman" is revealed to be a social construction.

But it would be wrong, therefore, to see in Foucault merely a project for the reclamation of lost voices. While Foucault's own studies are often exempla of the recuperation of marginal or seldom considered materials, feminist histories which concentrate solely on filling in the gaps and lacunae of traditional history, on giving a voice to women's silenced "sisters," may find themselves firmly reinscribed within the tenets of humanistic historicism, substituting, for example, a "great women's" history for that of the "great men." One of the buzz words of humanism which Foucault deconstructs in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is "tradition." "The problem," writes Foucault, "is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of lasting foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations" (*AK*,5). Once "woman" is seen as a social construction, the question of "tracing a line," of reclaiming women's lost history, becomes somewhat anachronistic.

But on what "new foundation," then, is feminism to build its abode? As feminists begin to examine their own work in the light of a Foucauldian critique, they are finding that what Foucault may offer is not so much an extension of works-in-progress as a change in direction.

III: De-sexualisation

> The real strength of the women's liberation movements is not that of having laid claim to the specificity of their sexuality and the rights pertaining to it, but that they have actually departed from the discourse conducted within the apparatuses of sexuality. These movements do indeed emerge in the nineteenth century as demands for sexual specificity. What has their outcome been? Ultimately a veritable movement of de-sexualisation, a displacement effected in relation to the sexual centering of the problem, formulating the demand for forms of culture, discourse, language and so on, which are no longer part of that rigid assignation and pinning-down to their sex which they had initially in some sense been politically obliged to accept in order to make themselves heard (*PK*,219-220).

Among French women theorists, the writer who seems to have come

closest to Foucault's ideas on de-sexualisation is Julia Kristeva. In her article "Women's Time," Kristeva isolates two phases in the women's movement's strategies for dealing with women's traditional exclusion from the social contract.[7] In the first, women "aspired to gain a place in linear time as the time of project and history" (*WT*,36) — in other words, to right the fact of their exclusion by making central what had been marginalized, by bringing women in, on an equal footing with men, to a system which would not be fundamentally changed by the fact of women's inclusion. In the second phase, "linear temporality has been almost totally refused, and as a consequence there has arisen an exacerbated distrust of the entire political dimension" (*WT*,37). In this phase women have rejected traditional sociopolitical and cultural models as inimical to women's needs, since such models are permeated through and through by the male libidinal economy which has created them. Instead, women of this second generation have sought alternative cultural models which will be more expressive of a unique feminine identity.

The danger of these strategies — and I think Kristeva and Foucault would agree here — is that both can be easily reappropriated by the systems of power they struggle against. The first most clearly, since it strives not so much to change the system as to find a place for women within it. But the second also, despite its rejection of male-centred models, since in positing a feminine *identity* it tends to elide the question of social construction and take refuge in a precarious essentialism. Proponents of a unique feminine identity have usually had to resort to a theory of biological difference which triumphs female sexuality as the basis for the subversion of male-dominated systems.[8] But it has been precisely on the basis of biological difference that women have been traditionally oppressed; any theory which resorts to such difference as its ground merely reinscribes itself within an old logic and risks perpetuating old stereotypes. And Foucault's analysis of the deployment of sexuality should alert feminists to the dangers of seeing any great liberating potential in female sexuality; sexuality itself, according to Foucault, is a social construct, one which has been deployed for the ends of power. "The irony of this deployment," Foucault writes in the last lines of *The History of Sexuality*, "is in having us believe that our 'liberation' is in the balance" (*HS*,159).

An essentialist position can only perpetuate an oppositional logic which many French theorists — most notably Jacques Derrida — have been trying to undo. Such a position posits a notion of "difference" as "absolute otherness" rather than as an "alterity" which can be shown to be internal to the system which has excluded it. Traditionally, oppositions like speech/writing, presence/absence, culture/nature, man/woman, have implied a hierarchy, with privilege being given to the first term. A notion of alterity, however, displaces the hierarchy by showing the second term to be the

necessary condition of the first — not as absolute other, but as a difference at the very heart of the privileged first term. In Foucauldian terms, hierarchized oppositions can be seen as another instance of the complicity of knowledge and power. Thus woman's constitution as man's other — passive rather than active, emotional rather than rational, secondary rather than primary — has served to solidify male domination. The problem with essentialist views which emphasize the positive qualities of "woman" against the repressive aspect of male-centred systems is that they tend to reverse the hierarchy without displacing it — that is, they place "woman" in the privileged position — and thus remain caught up in the very logic they are trying to subvert, a logic which is complicit with the systems of power that have traditionally silenced women.

Kristeva recognizes the necessity of these first impulses of the women's movement — both the attempted insertion into the system and the rejection of that system in the name of absolute difference; they may be seen to correspond roughly to what Foucault calls "that rigid assignation and pinning-down to their sex which women had initially in some sense been politically obliged to accept in order to make themselves heard." But Kristeva sees herself as part of a "third generation" — existing in parallel rather than chronological relation to the other two — for whom "the very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to *metaphysics*. What can 'identity,' even 'sexual identity,' mean in a new theoretical and scientific space where the very notion of identity is challenged?" (*WT*,51-52). Here is the "movement of de-sexualisation" which Foucault identifies as the most positive element of the women's movements, the "displacement effected in relation to the sexual centering of the problem." This displacement pushes the issue of "woman" outside the restricted logic of metaphysics and opens it up to the question of social construction, to questions of knowledge and power. But is this, then, the end of woman?[9]

IV: New Woman/Old Stereotypes

> The Germans are like women. You can never fathom their depths. They have none.
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche[10]

> . . . Nietzsche revives that barely allegorical figure (of woman) in his own interest. For him, truth is a woman. It resembles the veiled movement of feminine modesty.
>
> Jacques Derrida, *Spurs*[11]

We enter now the new landscape, beyond sexual identity. How have

things changed? For one thing, Nietzsche now looks like a proto-feminist — at least in the treatment he receives in Derrida's *Spurs*, where he appears to have pre-figured woman as the "untruth of truth," as that which undermines truth from within (*Spurs*,51).[12] But after all it is not biological women Derrida is talking about here; woman for Derrida is the supplement, différance, the lack at the center which displaces the center, and if there is any *body* involved in all of this, as Alice Jardine points out, it is the body of the text as *écriture*.[13]

Woman, then, has not disappeared in the poststructuralist landscape, though she has apparently changed her form. For one thing, she has shed her body; for another, she is no longer the absolute other but precisely the point of alterity, the internal exclusion which undermines the system. Simply speaking, woman has become, under several headings — supplement, *écriture*, feminine jouissance, seduction, the unconscious, the *vreél* — a trope, a metaphor for that which bursts through the boundaries of traditional codes.

Of course, in this new order of things, biological women have not entirely dropped out of the scene. Precisely because they have been traditionally marginalized, women may have special access to what has been now coded as a "feminine operation," the act of subversion. For Kristeva, for instance, women, because of their incomplete accession into the social order, are always "*le sujet-en-procès*," the subject in process/on trial, on the threshold between selfhood and its dissolution; they are thus in a privileged position to question the social construction of identity. But it is not a biological difference which thus distinguishes women, only a social one.

The case with someone like Hélène Cixous is more problematic. At times she tends towards a biological essentialism, suggesting that women's bodies are the basis for a subversive practice: "women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve discourse . . . ." (*NFF*,256). Yet she is willing to allow that someone like a Genet can write from the feminine (*NFF*,255), and she shows an allegiance to a Derridean deconstruction of opposites: "sexual opposition, which has always worked for man's profit to the point of reducing writing, too, to his laws, is only a historico-cultural limit" (*NFF*,253; see also *NFF*,90ff). Nonetheless, it would seem that women, that is women with bodies, are in a better position to take hold of feminine writing than men. "More so than men who are coaxed toward social success, toward sublimation, women are body. More body, hence more writing" (*NFF*,257).

But despite the recoding of the feminine as "the untruth of truth," as that which bursts "partitions, classes and rhetorics, regulations and codes," we might ask, as Jardine has, in what ways the New Woman — with or

without a body — is so different from the old.[14] Though Derrida's woman, for example, is (as one expects with Derrida) highly problematic, there are sentences in *Spurs* which wrench as sharply as any of the old stereotypes. "A woman seduces from a distance," Derrida writes. "In fact distance is the very element of her power. Yet one must beware to keep one's own distance from her beguiling song of enchantment" (*Spurs*,49). Here, certainly, is a depiction of woman as old as Genesis: woman as seductress, woman as sorceress. And again: "Because woman is (her own) writing, style must return to her. In other words, it could be said that if style were a man (much as the penis according to Freud is the 'normal prototype of fetishes'), then writing would be a woman" (*Spurs*,57). The problem with this equation of woman with text is that it exactly reiterates a paradigm which has long helped keep women silent: woman is she who is written, not she who writes. "The model of the pen-penis writing on the virgin page," writes Susan Gubar, in another context, "participates in a long tradition identifying the author as a male who is primary and the female as his passive creation — a secondary object lacking autonomy, endowed with often contradictory meaning but denied intentionality."[15] But finally Derrida also has a word or two for the feminists: "And in truth, they too are men, those women feminists so derided by Nietzsche. Feminism is nothing but the operation of a woman who aspires to be like a man.... Feminism too seeks to castrate" (*Spurs*,65).

We have to ask: does Derrida's deconstructive intent justify comments that in another context might be seen as blatant chauvinism? Granted it may be unfair to take Derrida's statements out of context, but perhaps to do so demonstrates the potential danger of this new appropriation of woman. To pose a very Foucauldian question, to what old uses might these "new" representations of woman be put? Whose interests do they serve? What are the dangers of a theory of woman that can elide Nietzsche's blatant misogyny? Even if Derrida is not referring to "real" women when he uses that name in his writing, Nietzsche (despite all the theoretical baggage that accrues around a word like "real" nowadays) certainly was. And for all the rigours of Derrida's thought, the line between deconstruction — the wearing away of old ontological ground — and reconstitution — the point at which subversive concepts crystallize into essences — is often rather thin. One need only look at the American appropriation of the Derridean concept of *mise en abyme* to see how radical concepts can be used to justify old institutions.[16]

Even Cixous's depiction of the New Woman sounds suspiciously like an old tale. For Cixous, woman is "a giver": "She doesn't 'know' what she's giving, she doesn't measure it; she gives, though, neither a counterfeit impression nor something she hasn't got. She gives more, with no assurance

that she'll get back even some unexpected profit from what she puts out" (*NFF*,264). Elsewhere, woman is a mother: "In women there is always more or less of the mother who makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation; a force that will not be cut off but will knock the wind out of codes" (*NFF*,252). Woman as giver, woman as mother — Cixous might be describing a positive ethos, but what is troubling is that she doesn't question the social construction of these two fairly standard depictions of woman, or look at them in terms of what role they have served in perpetuating women's oppression. Perhaps it is not enough simply to assert that the mother in women "will knock the wind out of codes."

One of the ironies of this postructuralist reappropriation of woman is that most of the leading theorists of the feminine — apart from Derrida, there is Lacan, Barthes, Baudrillard — are male.[17] Even Kristeva and Cixous take their basic framework from male theorists — Kristeva from Lacan and Cixous from Derrida — and both of them, when invoking paradigms of subversive or "feminine" writing, refer back to a male tradition (typically Mallarmé, Genet and Joyce). If these facts are not suspicious, they are certainly curious. Where, in fact, are *women* in the midst of all this talk about *woman*? It seems men, on top of everything else, are even better at being women than women are. And what, for example, does history look like when we get beyond sexual identity, and "woman" becomes an attitude rather than a signature?

V: Women and History

> What is a woman? I assure you I do not know. I do not believe you know.
>
> Virginia Woolf[18]

From the perspective of those who have moved beyond sexual identity, feminism, as a *women's* movement, cannot help but seem outdated, "nothing but the operation of a woman who aspires to be like a man" — who, in other words, remains caught up in the systems of power defined by the ruling (predominantly male) hegemony. Feminists are thus faced, as Peggy Kamuf admits, with "the erosion of the very ground on which to take a stand."[19] If feminism rests on a biological distinction, it remains open to charges of essentialism: the "feminine," writes Derrida, should not "be hastily mistaken for a woman's femininity, for female sexuality, or for any other of those essentializing fethishes which might still tantalize the dogmatic philosopher, the impotent artist or the inexperienced seducer who has not yet escaped his foolish hopes of capture" (*Spurs*,55). But if feminism rests on a *social* distinction, then it becomes very difficult to say who, under what

circumstances, is a woman. Feminists who try to have it both ways will find themselves tangled in thorny methodological problems.

To take one example: in an article on the image of Eve in *Paradise Lost*, Chritine Froula, alluding to a passage from Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, defines "woman" as someone who divines "the priest" of cultural authority, and so calls that authority into question.

> This definition identifies 'woman' not by sex but by a complex relation to the cultural authority which has traditionally silenced and excluded her. She resists the attitude of blind submission which that authority threatens to imprint upon her; further, her resistance takes form not as envy of the 'priest' and desire to possess his authority herself but as a debunking of the 'priestly' deployment of cultural authority and a refusal to adopt that stance herself. Women, under this local rule, can be 'men,' and men can be 'women.'[20]

But one problem with such "local rules," clearly, is that they are self-serving: if definitions of woman are up for grabs, there is little to stop one from choosing a definition that is tailor-made to fit one's own arguments. Another problem, within the specific context of *Paradise Lost*, is that one might conceivably make a case — though Froula's definition does seem to be trying to avoid this possibility — for Satan as a woman. And one could certainly make a case for the author of "On the New Forcers of Conscience Under the Long Parliament" and *Areopagitica* — that is, for Milton himself.[21] Perhaps, after all, Milton was of woman's party without knowing it, and he might take his place next to Nietzsche as one of history's misogynists reclaimed for the feminist ranks by new definitions of woman.

Little attempt has been made to show what a "history of women" would look like from beyond sexual identity. We have to ask, in fact, whether such a history would be possible. If we take Foucault as a model, then much of the historical work which has been done by feminists to date — the tracing of a women's heritage, the establishment of a women's "canon" — would have to be regarded as caught up with an old, essentially self-defeating, historicism. Jeffrey Weeks has outlined some of the problems confronting a history of homosexuality conducted within a Foucauldian frame;[22] a history of women would face the same kinds of problems. If "woman" is a social construction, then women can claim no universal essence which has united them through the ages, no "tradition" they can claim to follow in the line of. And in fact, even any synchronic movement based on a common sexual bond would have to be seen as rooted in an outmoded concept of sexual identity. Hence the move among some women in France today towards "anti-feminism," i.e. the rejection of a stance which takes sexual solidarity as its base.[23]

Yet it is Foucault himself who has made us sensitive to the subtle machinations of power, to the way power almost seems to plan ahead for the reappropriation of its own failures — as Foucault demonstrates, for example, in his analysis in *Discipline and Punish* of the "failure" of prison reform: prison reform has failed, in Foucault's view, not through an inefficiency of power, but as a strategy of power, as a means of creating a class of "delinquents" which power can then use for its own ends. So it would be timely to ask what interests this "beyonding" of sexual identity might serve. Why is it, for instance, that sexual identity is being elided at the very point at which women, after centuries of subjugation, have been emerging as a potent political force? Certainly any move which could effectively undermine women's solidarity could easily be reappropriated by the very systems of power which have traditionally worked to oppress women. And the "new" representations of woman which have arisen as a result (as a symptom?) of this eliding of sexual identity should also be examined in the light of a Foucauldian critique. We might ask of the new discourse on woman the questions which Foucault poses at the end of "What is an Author?":

> What are the modes of existence of this discourse?
> Where does it come from; how is it circulated; who controls it?
> What placements are determined for possible subjects?
> Who can fulfill these diverse functions of the subject?[24]

There is no guarantee that the new discourse will be "liberating" for women. Foucault himself warns that discourses can "circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy" (*HS*,102) — for example, from a strategy of subversion to one of suppression.

But this logic also suggests — and Foucault's own analyses, despite his call for "de-sexualisation," support this argument — that resistances can also operate *within* a given discourse. Thus Rosalind Coward, for instance, is not quite correct to say that Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, in denying that there has been any sudden change from repression to liberation over the past century in the discourse on sexuality, implies also a denial of the important changes in representations of female sexuality which have occurred during recent years.[25] "We must make allowance," Foucault writes, "for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy." Foucault again gives the example of homosexuality, which "began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (*HS*,101). A similar analysis would pertain,

certainly, to the women's movement and its fight for changes in the representation of female sexuality.

One matter I have not yet addressed is the shift which occurs in Foucault's later work, when he moves away from the classical period in France to classical antiquity. In this later work, we find a continuing concern with the question of the subject, but while Foucault speaks of the subject in relation to the Greeks, speaks, for example, of "the mode of subjection" by which "the individual establishes his relation to [a] rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it in practice," of a Greek boy's attempts to transform himself from "object of pleasure into a subject who was in control of his pleasures," of Greek ethics as "the elaboration of a form of relation to the self that enables an individual to fashion himself into a subject of ethical conduct," it seems he is talking here of a fundamentally different phenomenon than the subject he earlier defined as a product of the human sciences.[26] "Because no Greek thinker ever found a definition of the subject and never searched for one," Foucault has said, "I would simply say that there is no subject."[27] The Greeks, in Foucault's view, had developed what he calls an "aesthetics of existence," a system of ethics which allowed more room for individuality and self-creation than the later juridical ethics of Christianity. It is in the dawning of Christianity that Foucault sees the first move towards subject-hood, with the beginnings of a code-oriented morality which specified much more distinctly the limits of ethical behaviour, with the introduction of confession as a means of subjecting the very soul of an individual to the gaze of authority, and with the development of conscience as a way of turning that authoritarian gaze inward, of turning self against self as a mode of subjection.

But if we follow Foucault in this formulation of the subject's genealogy, then some limits in a feminist appropriation of his critique of the subject as a point of entry for analyzing woman's construction as "other" become apparent. As Nancy Miller points out, "society did not wait for the invention of man to repress 'woman' or oppress women"[28] — did not wait, in other words, until the subject was constituted by humanism before creating the categories of gender opposition which have served to solidify male domination. While Foucault's analysis of homosexual relations in ancient Greece, for example, shows they were viewed then in a fundamentally different light than in the modern era, his considerably less thorough and less satisfying analysis of women in that society reveals what seems to be a fundamental continuity: women were viewed by the Greeks as inferior by nature, to be ruled over and controlled, much as they were viewed later by the Christian church fathers, and much as they have been viewed almost up to the present day. Foucault does suggest a point at which representations of gender identity may have undergone an important shift, when the emphasis on the relationship between men and boys as "the most active

focus of reflection and elaboration" in classical Greek thought gave way, in the Roman and early Christian era, to the emphasis on relations between men and women, on virginity, and on "the value attributed to relations of symmetry and reciprocity between husband and wife" (*Use*,253). But even taking into account such a shift, an important residue remains. If Greek women were not "subjects" in Foucault's sense of the word, they were certainly subjected, and the main terms of that subjection — that is, a fundamental gender split, and a hierarchical organization of that split — are the same ones that feminists are dealing with today. The history of women, then, may in some respects be a continuous one, in that both the fact of their oppression, and the theoretical terms which have been used to justify that oppression, have demonstrated a tremendous staying power from era to era.

But Foucault's theories do not necessarily preclude this kind of continuity. Foucault himself has bemoaned the emphasis which commentators have placed on his notion of *dis*continuity:

> My problem was not at all to say, *'Voilà*, long live discontinuity, we are in the discontinuous and a good thing too,' but to pose the question, 'How is it that at certain moments and in certain orders of knowledge, there are these sudden take-offs, these hastenings of evolution, these transformations which fail to correspond to the calm, continuist image that is normally accredited? (*P/K*,112).

Yet only recently has the status of women shown signs of being in the process of a *fundamental* transformation, one which is shaking the roots of sexual differentiation and discrimination. And while it would be reductive to deny that any changes have occured in the image of woman from era to era, many of these changes — for example, the "medicalisation" of the female body which Foucault has pointed to — have merely served to reaffirm women's marginal status. Thus while relations of power may alter according to the kinds of major transformation which Foucault has noted, certain strands in each era's web, specifically those which have accrued around gender oppositions, have remained strong throughout the long history of women's oppression. The forces which have held these strands in place will also have to be looked at before we have finished with the question of woman.

VI: Intellectuals and Power

> The intellectual no longer has to play the role of advisor. The project, tactics and goals are a matter for those who do the fighting. What the intellectual can do is provide the instruments of analysis (*PK*,62).

Foucault's "toolkit" view of theory should help put him in perspective for feminists. While he seems to sympathise with the move "beyond" sexual identity, his work still provides tools for those feminists still fighting, as women, in the trenches, where the battle is far from over. As Biddy Martin points out with respect to the current eliding of sexual identity, "the projects of male" (and, I would add, some female) "critics and feminist critics are necessarily non-synchronous despite commonalities."[29] Feminists have only just begun the work of reclamation and production necessary to guard against women's being eclipsed once again at the very moment of their emergence into history. Would a move away from sexual oppositions towards a more epistemologically "correct" position imply, for instance, that women academics should stop lobbying to get more women's work included on course lists? That reading Joyce (whose own views on women are far from trouble-free) may bring one closer to the "feminine" than reading, say, Virginia Woolf? Someone like Derrida (after all a man) may rejoice in the subversive potential of a woman who is "a non-identity, a non-figure, a simulacrum" (*Spurs*,49); but such "non-identity," as countless feminist analyses have shown, has been precisely the status of women since time immemorial, and this status — for all its supposedly subversive potential — has been the main source of their oppression.

I am not suggesting that feminists reject the new discourses on "woman" out of hand, or that they ignore the epistemological concerns which have prompted those discourses. Instead they should get the lay of the land, see what old faces lurk in the new landscape, judge what is germane to the political reality they face. Next to the Marxist "always historicize," we might add the very post-modern "always problematize."

At the end of *The Order of Things*, Foucault writes that if the arrangements which led to the birth of the human sciences were to disappear, "then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" (*OT*,387). But before that happens perhaps woman's face will have to be etched firmly beside it, if only as a network of scars on a once-smooth surface.

Montréal

Notes

1. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 387. Hereafter cited as *OT*.

2. Biddy Martin, "Feminism, Criticism, and Foucault," *New German Critique*, 27 (1982), 17. Emphasis added.

3. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, trans. Colin Gordon et al., ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 98. Hereafter *P/K*.

4. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 192. Hereafter *DP*.

5. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 43. Hereafter *HS*.

6. Michel Foucault, *The Archaelogy of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 12. Hereafter *AK*.

7. Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, in *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology*, ed. Nannerl O. Keohane et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). Hereafter *WT*.

8. See, for example, Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which is Not One," trans. Claudia Reeder, in *New French Feminisms*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), pp. 99-106. Hélène Cixous, in "The Laugh of the Medusa," (trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *New French Feminisms*, pp. 245-264) also suggests a difference between male and female sensibility grounded in differing sexual economies, but the case with Cixous, as indicated below, is problematic. (*New French Feminisms* will hereafter be cited as *NFF*.)

9. Among American critics, Peggy Kamuf has used a specifically Foucauldian framework to arrive at a position similar to Kristeva's. See her article, "Replacing Feminist Criticism," *Diacritics*, 12, No. 2 (1982), 42-47. Though Kamuf does not acknowledge any debt to Kristeva, she also seems to see herself as part of a "third generation"; she isolates two feminist strategies, strikingly similar to the two "phases" Kristeva identifies, which are doomed to perpetuate the system women have been trying to subvert: "on the one hand an expansion of institutions to include at their center what has been historically excluded; on the other hand, the installing of a counter-institution based on feminine centred cultural models" (Kamuf, p. 45).

10. Quoted in *The Great Quotations*, comp. George Seldes (Secaucus, N.J.: Castle Books, 1960), p. 530.

11. Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles/Éperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 51. Hereafter *Spurs*.

12. Derrida, anticipating objections to his rather "eccentric" reading of Nietzsche, summarizes his own position thus: "Must not these *apparently feminist* propositions be reconciled with the overwhelming *corpus* of Nietzsche's venomous anti-feminism? Their congruence (a notion which I oppose by convention to that of coherence), although ineluctably enigmatic, is just as rigorously necessary. Such, in any case will be the thesis of the present communication" (*Spurs*, 57). It is impossible to do justice to the rigours of Derrida's analysis here; what concern me more are the potential *uses* of that analysis.

13. Alice Jardine, "Gynesis," *Diacritics*, 12, No. 2 (1982), 64. Jardine gives a good overview of the role of "woman" in current French theory, though she concentrates mainly on Lacan and his followers. I take her article as a point of departure for what follows.

14. Jardine, p. 64.

15. Susan Gubar, "The Blank Page and the Issues of Female Creativity," in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 77.

16. For the best critique of this appropriation, see Frank Lentricchia's chapter on poststructuralism in *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 156-210; also his chapter on Paul de Man, pp. 282-317. Paul A. Bové provides a similar analysis in his essay "Variations on Authority: Some Deconstructive Transformations of the New Criticism," in *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*, ed. Jonathan Arac, Wlad Godzich and Wallace Martin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 2-19. See also Wlad Godzich, "The Domestication of Derrida," in the same volume, pp. 20-40.

17. See Jacques Lacan, *Encore* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975); Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Jean Baudrillard *De la séduction* (Paris: Galilée, 1980).

18. Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 2, ed. M.H. Abrams et al. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), p. 2047.

19. Kamuf, p. 42.

20. Christine Froula, "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy," *Critical Inquiry*, 10 (1983), 321-347. The Woolf passage alluded to is from *Jacob's Room* (1922; New York, 1978), pp. 40-41.

21. Edward Pechter, in a response to Froula ("When Pechter Reads Froula Pretending She's Eve Reading Milton; or, New Feminist Is But Old Priest Writ Large," *Critical Inquiry*, 11, 1984, 163-170) notes the fact of Milton's own anti-authoritarianism, though he does not take specific issue with Froula's definition of woman.

22. Jeffrey Weeks, "Discourse, desire and sexual deviance: some problems in a history of homosexuality," in *The Making of the Modern Homosexual*, ed. Kenneth Plummer (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble Books, 1981), pp. 76-111.

23. Jardine discusses French anti-feminism in "Gynesis."

24. Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), p. 138.

25. Rosalind Coward, "Are Women's Novels Feminist Novels?" in *The New Feminist Criticism*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 234.

26. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), pp. 27, 225, 251. Hereafter *Use*.

27. Michel Foucault, "Final Interview," *Raritan*, 5, No. 1 (1985), 1-13.

28. Nancy Miller, "The Text's Heroine: A Feminist Critic and Her Fictions," *Diacritics*, 12, No. 2 (1982), 49. Miller's article is a response to Kamuf's "Replacing Feminist Criticism," in the same issue.

29. Martin, p. 21.