The True Feminine Identity

[The subject] is not a substance; it is a form…

Michel Foucault

In the previous chapter we have seen how certain thinkers drew on Lacan and Marx to formulate a novel revolutionary political philosophy to facilitate emancipatory project. The project was inevitably based on the true political subject who would be responsible for conducting the true political struggle to overthrow the tyranny of the repressive Symbolic.

As we have mentioned earlier, the formation of identity in Lacan’s theory occurs through the mechanisms of repression. The entry into the symbolic occurs with the onset of the Oedipal conflict. The child’s unified identity constructed in relation to its desire for the mother is interrupted by the father. The interruption, the prohibition, and repression together form the first and the foremost stage leading to the realm of the Symbolic; the realm of Father, language, Law and culture. The repressed desire is called 'lack', 'void', 'absence' or the 'Real', the realm that the child tries to overcome by the Symbolic mechanism: language. And the normal identity is the one which knows well how to play the game of presence and absence, Real and
Symbolic, by learning the language and acquiring mastery over the signified-signifier system, the mastery which helps the subject to transform absence into presence.

But Marxist-Lacanists (MLs) try to go beyond the repressive law of the symbolic. In other words, their political attempt is to avoid the exploitative ‘game’ of the Symbolic. Not being satisfied with the representations of the Real-Idea in the shadows of symbolic world, they are led to make the Real emerge or be heard in the political arena. In Badiou’s approach, the true subject, 'Mystic', by tracing the footsteps of the Event-Real in the Symbolic, could discern the false event from the fake one. By liberating itself from the repressive game of the symbolic, it would approach the Real to the extent that the 'Resurrection of the truth event' could be revealed. Similarly, by drawing a strict line between those who do not have rights and those who have rights Ranciere argues that the 'demos' that is totally deprived of political power, or the benefits of the symbolic are the true possessors of right. Hence, by destabilizing the existing order, the demos would throw away the 'new bourgeois' from the symbolic and establish its own true order 'to be included in the public realm' and to make their voice heard through true political action. And in the final analysis, the 'non-part' of the society which ontologically occupies the 'Real' should step into the symbolic, public realm, to liberate itself and overthrow the ruling elite.

This chapter explains how the French Lacanist feminists (FLFs) advance an argument resembling the ones offered by the MLs. Reinterpreting Lacan’s theory of the symbolic and the repressive realm of the Father, this group of feminists attempts to find the emancipatory alternative not in the Real, but in the pre-Oedipal realm, the Imaginary, through which the true and ideal femininity could be revealed. Hence, I will focus on the three key thinkers of the canon: Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous. I will also
examine Lacan’s definitions of sexual difference as also his views on the formation of sexual identity in both the sexes, and then analyze how the FLFs who were initially influenced by Lacan’s theory of language and formation of identity, eventually distanced themselves from him in order to create a distinctive feminine identity free from the Law of the Father.

Identifying their theoretical contradictions or their 'self-defeating' approaches is not my only theoretical concern. I will also try to show how this group of feminists, like MLs appeals to the concepts of Law, lack, repression and prohibition as the key elements of their emancipatory feminist action; and how this limited conceptualization of power decreases their theoretical potentiality, and accordingly deprives them of the innovative weapons needed to struggle effectively.

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But before going to Lacan and French feminism, I would like to respond to some possible questions in advance. I may be asked why in this critique, I did not start with the work of FLF which predates that of the MLs. I could be easily branded as a fake female subject of patriarchy who prioritizes men over women, male thinkers over female ones. Why did I not consider the linear course of analysis, which is seen in most theoretical works, moves from the past to the present, from the old to the contemporary, to seek the origins of the truth lying behind things, to discover the treasures buried in the origins? In other words, why did I not commit myself to the usual and classical task of removing the masks to disclose the essence of the things?

I could simply respond to these questions by saying that I have started from male thinkers in order to criticize them first and foremost. Or by saying that I aimed at revolting against the linear analysis of traditional history whose
task is studying the 'lofty origins'. But, in fact, they would be just naively reasonable justifications. I think the only reason for this apparent discontinuity of things relates to the issue of event, the issue of chance.

In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", Foucault like Nietzsche posits an opposition between traditional history and effective history. His approach to history is genealogical. According to him, `effective history studies what is closest, but in an abrupt dispossesssion, so as to seize it at distance`, it `inverts the relationship ordinarily established between the eruption of an event and the necessary continuity`; whereas traditional history, which is the `history of historians` dissolves `the singular events into an ideal continuity`. Traditional history aims to contemplate `distances and heights` but effective history `shortens its vision to those things nearest to it`. Genealogy or effective history should be sensitive to the events' recurrence `not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution but to isolate the different scenes where they engage in different roles`.

What in fact motivated me was not `the destiny or regulative mechanisms` but the possibility of the battle 'for they always appear through the singular randomness of events', but the tastes and preferences together with `the errors, the false appraisals and the faulty calculation that gave birth to those things which continue to exist and have value for us`. Honestly, the ML canon was my first confrontation with the issue of political identity. I then found a close kinship between it and FLF canon. Observing how different forces and philosophies try to remove `every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity` has been so interesting that I could not avoid the temptation of critiquing the male canon prior to its feminist counterparts. Accordingly, I freely submit myself to the randomness of events and to the singularities, to the chances. I simply jump into the middle of the battle, without considering any starting point or end point. I noticed that changing the direction of analysis
does not affect the work; as in any case the possible result would be the same: \( x + y = z \) or \( y + x = z \). Hence I kept the direction that my work took by chance, studying the rules and functions which govern the canons beyond "an unbroken continuity". Examining the manner of struggle that different forces wage against each other or against adverse circumstances is the only reason underlying my analysis. I do not hark back to "the unique threshold of emergence, the homeland to which metaphysicians promise a return".

Although, I start with MLs, the reader is quite free to start with any point she/he wishes, or considers to be necessary, as we live "among countless lost events, without a landmark or a point of reference" with "the iron hand of necessity shaking the dice – box of chance".

**Lacan and the Issue of Sexual Identity**

According to Lacan, sexual difference is not biologically inscribed in the body from birth, it is produced by the subject's entry into the symbolic order. Accordingly, it is language that is responsible for placing the individual into the given cultural structures by designating them as "woman" or "man". In this sense, sexual difference is nothing but an arbitrary construction centered on phallus.

To Lacan, the facts regarding sexual difference "reveal a relation of subject to the phallus that is established without regard to the anatomical difference of sexes". According to him early childhood is termed as the Imaginary coinciding with the pre-Oedipal stage which is characterized by the principle of undifferentiation. At this stage there is "no awareness of any separation between self and the other, infant and Mother, inside and outside, male and female". This crucial moment in the Imaginary, which is the mirror phase, is treated by the FLF as a significant determinant of the feminine identity. Seeing
itself through the Gestalt image in the mirror, the child feels gratified to find itself unified. This identification could be the child's reflection in a mirror, an awareness of its mother or identification with another infant. So, in this stage there is no difference between the child and its image, the child and its mother, the child and the other, and finally self and self. But this undifferentiation, this unity of self and other--child and mother--is broken by the entry of the father, by the phallus. The child is separated from the early state of unity and fullness by the repressive Law which Lacan calls "the Name of the Father." This stage which is also called the Symbolic order, could be the crucial moment in the child's sexual identity or the formation of gender.

Accordingly, Zizek says "sexual difference doesn't designate any biological opposition grounded in 'real' properties but a purely symbolic opposition to which nothing corresponds in the designated objects." The movement into the symbolic order occurs with the advent of Oedipal conflict in which the desire for the mother is repressed and displaced as the child's unified self, constructed in relation to its desire for the mother is interrupted by the father. And the Lack occurs as the child notices that the mother's desire is not him but on his phallus. Hence, the child tries to fill the gap by choosing as love object a member of the opposite sex. But the subject's success in overcoming the gap or the lack of phallus relates to its success in the 'Fort-Da' game, making absent objects present in language, through signifying process. Lacan says: "The phallus is the privileged signifier of that mark in which the role of the logos [...] is joined with the advent of desire." Accordingly, the introduction to the Symbolic produces Lack and desire as well.

To Lacan phallus is the Master Signifier "by virtue of its turgidity, [the phallus] is the image of the vital flow [...] transmitted in generation." Having or not having the phallus idealizes the sex roles. The phallus structures gender relations by constructing a distinction between having the phallus and being
the phallus. Masculinity is supposed to have the phallus, whereas femininity is expected to be the phallus. In other words, the male subject possesses the signifier of paternal law, while the female subject who is incapable of such possession tries to incarnate the symbol in order to satisfy the other. But both the subjects suffer from the lack in the symbolic order, as none of them could possess the real phallus in the symbolic order. None of them could fulfill another's desire in Real and, accordingly, the "Fort-Da" game in the signifying process would be played endlessly. In the symbolic game the situation of femininity is more devastating, because the female subject is not valued for her feminine character, but for a phallic role she plays in the symbolic order. To Lacan, the feminine character is a "masquerade": Desiring to be the phallus, she must reject aspects of her femininity. Accordingly in the formation of sexual identity there is no mark of the vagina; and libido is masculine in nature.

Through his reading of Lacan and his critique of feminism, Zizek says: "Although Lacan talks about feminine enjoyment, jouissance, that eludes the phallic domain, he conceives of it as an effable dark continent, separated from male discourse by a frontier impossible to trespass"; and finally he concludes "woman in herself is ultimately a male fantasy".

**French Lacanist Feminism**

Simone de Beauvoir, one of the main pioneers of feminism argues in *The Second Sex* that women are women "in virtue of their anatomy and physiology. Throughout history they have always been subordinated to men, and hence their dependency is not the result of a historical event or a social change – it was not something that occurred". Accordingly, woman is a biological construction. But quite paradoxically she argues that women are not born
women biologically, rather "they remain women and become women" socially and culturally.

This famous sentence and her later elaborations made her well known as a modern feminist who makes a distinction between sex and gender, although she never used the term 'gender' in her works. In this way, "woman" came to be understood as a social construction with its particular roles and functions. Thus, one becomes a woman through the fashioning of gender roles and positions within social structures. But the construction itself is under the authority of patriarchy, which considers woman as inferior to man, or as the Other: "He is the subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other..." Hence, shifting from biologically determined sex to gender as social construction was a crucial moment in feminist epistemology. Although confirming that gender is a patriarchal construction, the second wave of feminists has found in it the promising aura by which they could release themselves from the destiny and burden of biology from which their ancestors could not liberate themselves totally: "the division of sex is a biological fact, not an event in human history".

Hence, the French feminists offer a way forward through psychoanalytic/linguistic analysis. They contend that it is not culture or society which is responsible for the exploitation of women; rather it is due to the psychic structures which are contained in the Symbolic order. So, what is needed is not a revolution in society, but as Duchen says a "revolution in the symbolic". Since the symbolic is internalized in women's psyche, 'masculinity' is not in culture or society, but is "in women's head". Accordingly, the FLFs invoke Lacan's principles to argue that sexual difference is not biologically inscribed in the body, but is constructed by the subject's entry into the symbolic order. The symbolic order, the name of Father, is necessarily patriarchal; and the meaning is constructed by the Master Signifier, the phallus. Hence, it is
language which turns people into "man" or "woman", the language which is built around the phallus.

This phallocentric discourse is the major target of the French feminist challenge. Accordingly, Antoinette Fouque as a psychoanalyst feminist interprets psychoanalytic approach of 'woman has never existed', as follows:

From the moment that she [a woman] begins to speak, she has to face problems which are all masculine and this is what puts her in mortal danger— if she doesn't use them, she doesn't exist, if she does use them, she kills herself with them.  

Hence, the Symbolic is the source of exploitation, repression and colonization of the imaginary. And, what is needed as women's emancipation is "deconstruction of the Symbolic".

In the FLF’s rewriting of Lacan's theory, the unconscious is the site of repressed meanings and feminine desires which do not conform to the Law of patriarchal symbolic order in which women are understood as 'lack'. By identifying the unconscious as the site of the repressed meanings, the site of repressed feminine, these feminists attempt to avoid the colonization of the imaginary by reviving the pre-oedipal relationship with the mother, which challenges the patriarchal definition of Lack— and to go ultimately beyond a dualistic model of difference in which women are lesser than men.

This section examines whether the FLFs in their efforts of offering a feminine alternative model and getting rid of the Law and its repressive mechanisms could create a new and emancipated subject, or whether they are still caught in a reductionist juridico-discursive understanding of power and a deterministic concept of the subject.
Julia Kristeva

As a psychoanalyst and a linguist Kristeva has been influenced by Lacan's theory of language and the human psyche. Yet, she has tried to distance herself from Lacan so as to emancipate feminist philosophy from the authority of the master–phallus signifier, in which women regularly featured as victims and were assigned an inferior position in Symbolic order. According to her, the symbolic order is fundamentally based on a 'sacrificial relationship' in which 'the exploitation of women is still too great'. Hence, her main question in "Women's Time" is "what can be our place in the symbolic contract?" Kristeva answers the question by contrasting the rational, logical, grammatical and repressive symbolic order, the Name of Father, with the sub-rational semiotic. Revising the Lacanian theory of the constitution of sexual identity or the gendered subject in the symbolic order, Kristeva emphasizes on the femininity in the pre-Oedipal stage which is semiotic by nature. To Kristeva, this semiotic language precedes language and consists of the polyphonies, bi-rhythmical cooing and babbling of child, the language which is later repressed to foreground the subject-predicate structure of the Symbolic order. She thus maintains the importance of the pre-Oedipal phase in the formation of the true feminine identity by cherishing the unconscious as the base and potentiality which brings about the heterogeneous polyphonies. The unconscious could deconstruct the rationalist and well-policed communication in the symbolic order:

Nevertheless who could criticize that fundamentalist illusion of a 'foundation' to be restored, without recognizing that it is rooted in a sound intuition: namely, that there are other forms of logic that are if not deeper, then at least heterogeneous to the well-policed and policing surface of
rational and rationalist communication? The logic of the unconscious, the rhythms and polyphonies of the music underlying the verbal utterances and verbiage.  

Since the unconscious corresponds to the Imaginary, to the pre-Oedipal stage, which itself is sacred: "the sacred is also the imaginary". And at the same time, the imaginary has the potentiality of "a non-sacrificial sacred" which could be considered as "eternal return, which opens the mind and body to an inquietude without end, and makes possible to stand straight and lithe in the world".

To Kristeva, the pre-Oedipal stage, the imaginary, the semiotic, the language of poetry are all incarnated in the maternal body or in the unique relationship between mother and child. Only in this particular and miraculous relationship "the unitary subject can no longer find his [sic] place", and the distinction and separation between I and the 'other', subject, and object outside and inside could be overcome. Accordingly, she contends that in the "mother's connection to the child […] miraculous alchemy occurs: the object of erotic satisfaction, the father […] is slowly reabsorbed into a loved, and only loved, 'other' […] the object of satisfaction is transformed into an 'other'; Similarly, she concludes that "outside the motherhood no situations exist in human experience that so radically and so simply bring us face to face with that emergence of the other."  

Combining the psychoanalytic theory of separation and the linguistic theory of difference, Kristeva provides an alternative to the Lacanian model of acquisition of language and formation of identity. Hence, she deduces that the maternity, femininity, the 'vaginal body' with its medium which is semiotic, namely poetic language, is the place free from the prohibitive and sacrificial relationship of the Symbolic order. Kristeva says:
In any case, the vaginal body, the dwelling place of the species, imposes on women an experience of interior of 'internal reality', that does not allow itself to be easily sacrificed by the prohibition [...] (language, images, thought and so on) [...] a woman remains stranger to the sacrifice: she participates in it [...] but she disrupts it, she can also threaten it.28

To Kristeva, femininity per se has the natural and essential potentiality to disrupt the masculine discourse and threaten it. But she has revealed that 'the exploitation of women is still too great', this statement which paradoxically indicates the potentiality, per se, cannot work. Here we will try to examine whether Kristeva’s theory is able to deal with these different and sometimes contradictory conceptualizations.

Kristeva establishes her theory of language on the model subject-in-process. She maintains that any theory of language corresponds to a theory of the subject. In other words, as far as subjectivity is in process of becoming, language also is in a dynamic process. The dynamism would be revealed in poetic language, the semiotic. Hence, she argues that until the umbilical cord is cut, there is no separation between mother and infant: the two are one. The traditional autonomous unitary subject would be broken down by the maternal body and the fixed identity will be split in materiality. But the infant must go through the process of abjection in order to be weaned. The infant experiences horror at the lack of border between his mother and his body, and through the process of negativity— the feeling of uncanniness and abjection — distances himself from the mother's body. The negativity — according to the Hegelian dialectic — or the abjection is the first stage in the process of socialization and acquisition of language. So to Kristeva, it is not castration through the Oedipal conflict which is responsible for learning language, rather it is abjection of the
mother's body which structures the subject-in-process of the semiotic. She says: "Poetic language would be for its questionable subject-in-process the equivalent of incest"; so there is a language before language or "the law before the law"; in other words, the semiotic before the semantic. The mechanism of the relationship of the fetus in the womb, and after birth, the way that the mother monitors what goes into and comes out of the infant's body, are all part of the process of acquiring language and also the process of socialization. The whole process is not based on conflict, but on abjection. Through the process, the subject does not fight with the other, as the other is in herself, but confronts it through negativity.

Then, to Kristeva, the relation of mother with her child could be the political solution for the problem of xenophobia, if we recognize that the other is in ourselves. Hence, it is the process of castration in the Name of Father which is the foundation of painful separation, difference and finally alienation. In this respect, abjection, as an alternative, would offer a peaceful solution for recognizing the other, not fighting with him; the solution which is supposed to dissolve the boundary and the hostility between outside and inside, subject and object, man and women. Kristeva contends that "By recognizing our uncanny strangeness we shall neither suffer from it nor enjoy it from the outside. The foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners. If I am foreigner, there are no foreigners." Here, Kristeva attempts to show that the pre-Oedipal sphere, the Imaginary stage, could offer a new aspect of subjectivity or identity which is impossible in Lacan's phallocentric theory.

In "Women's Time", Kristeva examines two generations of women which correspond with two main approaches to time: the 'linear', namely historical and chronological; and 'monumental', namely repetitive and cyclical. The first generation is determined by the implications of national demands, while the second generation is more determined by its place within
the `symbolic denominator' which is European or trans-European. According to her classification, the first generation, the pre-1968 generation, of women, was concerned with the advocacy of women's rights in a linear understanding of time; while the second generation, the post-1968 generation, distrusting the "entire political dimension" grapples with an aesthetic or psychoanalytic experience. The latter associated with femininity on the basis of its affinity with women's biological rhythms; and hence its concerns would be transnational. The first generation attempts to include itself in a sociosymbolic contract in order to enjoy it as such, while the second generation attempts to subvert it by rejecting the symbolic contract. The first generation's struggles become "the pillars of existing governments, guardians of status quo, the most zealous protection of the established order". The second generation easily takes the radical and violent approach by trying to "make of the second sex a counter society", a "female society". The counter society is inevitably led to the "expulsion of an excluded element, the scapegoat charged with the evil of which the community duly constituted can then purge itself". Since both feminist approaches suffer from masculine values, she proposes the third possible model. The third model is supposed to avoid protecting the established order and at the same time, to be free from the fantasy of being outside the law, a female society, a counter society, namely an `a-topia`.

Thus, Kristeva contends that the first generation of women was trying to include themselves into the established order through identification with power. Whereas the second generation was trying to exclude themselves from it through constitution of a fetishist counter power, it still stayed in the sacrificial symbolic contract. On the other hand, the third possible model, according to her formulation, should be `world wide in scope` to avoid the deficiencies of the first and second models. To her, "identification with the potency of the imaginary", maternity and the poetic would help women to lift
the weight of the `sacrificial` Symbolic from their shoulders. The possibilities could be the `anti sacrificial` current which animates our culture against the pressures and constraints of the sociosymbolic contract, and finally they would overcome the dichotomy man/woman, the rivalry between sexes.

Although Kristeva's model cherishes the differences between the sexes, she ambiguously seeks to efface the problem of difference, namely, "a fight to death" between rival groups. In her theory, we see two types of differences: the peaceful and the hostile. On the one hand, the peaceful difference should be there, like the difference and separation between mother and child. The differences sometimes articulated in terms of the dialectic between mother and child or in terms of separation and coexistence of the self and of an other by which the hostile difference leading to a fight to death, could be demolished. The dialectical process "leads the mother into the labyrinths of an experience that, without the child, she would only rarely encounter: love for an other". The same coexistence which occurs in literature, in the poetic, through the dialectic of the semiotic and the symbolic reveals "certain knowledge and sometimes the truth itself about an otherwise repressed, nocturnal, secret, and unconscious universe".

According to Kristeva, the subjectivity in process corresponds to the dialectical process in Hegelian terms. The process is not supposed to lead to a homogenous identity; rather, it leads to heterogeneous identities and to negativity: "Modern Poetry is produced by a heterogeneous subject, split between the semiotic and the symbolic, between language and a body of memories and affects and drives [...] the subject of negativity, unlike the subject of negation, refuses the compelling power of the law." But this peaceful negativity should be accompanied by the hostile process of detachment. And the detachment from the phallic order is recognized by some women and not by all women: "detachment which is the very mark of
femininity [...] which [detachment] gives some of us (most of us? the best of us? ) the chance to realize asocial sociability ". But this gives me to a series of questions:

How is it that some of the vaginal bodies do not realize the detachment which is a crucial element of their freedom? How do some of the feminine bodies easily conform with the norms of society and do not fight against the established order? How could `some of us` or `the best of us` be successful in realizing `asocial sociability` and some could not? How could the a-priori relation of mother-child avoid fighting to death, whereas fight-to-death-mother-child relationships are frequent in our societies? What happened that these mothers of society could not avoid fighting with the others? In other words, how should we read the fighting mothers or fighting women of our societies in terms of the peaceful vaginal bodies? How could they be the peaceful deconstructionists of the status quo if they would not treat the others as part of themselves? How does the peaceful difference turn into a hostile one, and vice versa? How could this pleasant and liberal dialectic work practically; namely what would be the engine of the dialectic of negativity? And finally how does the engine get out of the fuel?

In "Women's Time", Kristeva does not deal with these questions directly. But in other works, she attempts to grapple with the related issues. For example in "might not universality be... our own foreignness?" she considers psychoanalysis as an emancipatory tool and a pragmatic solution. Kristeva argues that psychoanalysis could help us to understand the difference between the sexes, as the difference is a product of the sociosymbolic internalization of sexual identity. It also emphasizes on a divided subjectivity, according to which each person is simultaneously the same and the other, the fact by which love for the other could be recognized and the hatred of the foreigner could be eluded. She says:
By recognizing our canny strangeness we shall neither suffer from it nor enjoy it from outside. The foreigner is within me, hence, we shall all be foreigners. If I am foreigner, there are no foreigners. 41

And then she deduces that psychoanalysis could help the subject to become conscious of its unconscious:

The ethics of psycho-analysis implies a politics: it would involve a cosmopolitanism of a new sort that, cutting across governments, economies, and markets, might work for a mankind whose solidarity is founded on the consciousness of its unconscious. 42

Accordingly the `cosmopolitanism` of psychoanalysis or the emancipatory third model of "women's time" which is supposed to be world wide in scope, all, are founded on the conceptualization of the consciousness of its unconscious. 43

Hence, it is the consciousness, the realm of masculine rationality and symbolic order, which would play the crucial role of emancipation via recognizing the unconscious, the repressed realm of femininity, the locus of the imaginary. But as we have seen, Kristeva paradoxically applauds the unconscious as the base and origin which by deconstructing the rationalist masculine order—the consciousness—brings about heterogeneous subjectivity and polyphonic language. The unconscious, although it is supposed to be overcome by the conscious, would be the foundation which could act as an emancipatory force to demolish the masculine repressive realm of the conscious! On the other hand, her approach to feminine emancipation poses some other issues which are drastically problematic:
First, Kristeva cherishes the \textit{vaginal body}, woman-mother body, as a pre-
given potentiality which although repressed by the masculine order, has the
possibility to demolish the social contract and the existing order by exposing
the unsaid semiotic. She values the maternal identification, since it could lift
the burden of sacrificial symbolic contract from women's shoulder. In this
analysis woman as such is an a-priori and a-historical \textit{entity} which, via its
\textit{biological destiny}, would be the locus of emancipation. The \textit{entity-identity}
which is assumed to be `in-process' and to be in dialectic with the symbolic in
order to produce heterogeneous identities, itself is not subjected to historical
dialectical evolution and power relations. It contains, throughout history and in
all societies, the transcendental potentiality which would be the source of
inspiration for the women's movement. And in the final analysis, the mother-
woman possesses the peaceful and innocent nature which in relation to the
historical process could save her \textit{ideal} and metaphysical essence.

But the mother–child relation, in reality and not in the realm of \textit{ideas}, is a
power relation which is informed by discursive and non-discursive elements.
The mother herself is a compound of forces which interact with each other,
with other forces and with other bodies. The relation is ever subjected to
change and becoming. Accordingly, considering an ideal, sacred, fixed, pre
historical and pre given place in the mother's body as the pre- Oedipal and
inevitably univocal would be nothing innovative, but the Eden before the fall
into the Oedipal world\textsuperscript{44}. Hence, Kristeva ironically subordinates the
polyphonies and all manifestations of various cultural expressions to the self
same principle of maternity, and accordingly, reduces all heterogeneities and
multiplicities to the a-historical principle of maternal identity: the
heterogeneity has become the homogeneity, the polygonal has become the
univocal, \textit{castration} has become \textit{abjection} and finally her theory falls into the
'a-topic' of 'female society', the counter-society with which she strongly opposed.

The second problem which is posed by Judith Butler is about the ambiguity of the ontological status of the semiotic in Kristeva’s theory. Kristeva contends that the semiotic, the poetic language, has the potentiality of deconstructing the symbolic and its prohibitive paternal law; namely, semiotic is before the law, before meaning. Butler argues that to Kristeva "These acts of poesies reveal an instinctual heterogeneity that [...] challenges the mastery of the univocal signifier, and diffuses the autonomy of subject". On the other hand, although the semiotic in itself has the possibility of language in escaping the paternal law, it is inevitably in the territory of law, and it is not outside the law, outside the language or outside the culture. Hence, Kristeva draws a problematic relation among drives, language and law. If the drives must first be repressed for language and meaning to emerge, how could we attribute meaning to drives prior to language, prior to meaning, prior to Law? In other words, Butler argues that "If these drives are manifest only in language or in cultural forms already determined as symbolic, then how is it that we can verify their pre-symbolic ontological status"? How can we determine their oppositional status and their causal mechanisms? And finally "what cultural configuration of language, indeed, of discourse, generates the trope of a pre-discursive libidinal multiplicity, and for what purposes?"

These are the questions which are left totally unanswered in her theory. In fact, in her theoretical attempt to create a novel alternative to the Paternal Law, Kristeva resorts to the ‘law before law’ which is Maternal. Her method of treatment could not cure the symptoms of the old Law, as she still benefits from the same prescription of the Fathers of psychoanalysis whom she criticizes strongly to interpret power and its functions in terms of repressive
Law. In his critique of juridico-disursive understanding of power in terms of repression, oppression or domination Michel Foucault says:

The West never had a system for the representation, the formulation and the analysis of power other than law and the system of law [...] I believe it is a juridical conception of power, of which we must now rid ourselves, if we want to analyze the real functioning of power.48

**Luce Irigaray**49

Influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis, Irigaray also contends that in the laws of the Symbolic, women's traits, women's difference and women's sexuality are not represented, in other words *woman does not exist* in the Symbolic Order. Accordingly, the appropriation of the repressed imaginary and the decoding of the repressing patriarchal Symbolic are the political and ethical strategies which are followed by Irigaray: "We should go on and on – but perhaps we should return to the repressed female imaginary?"50

Following linguistic theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Irigaray focuses on the asymmetrical power relations which underlie the formation of women identity as the 'other' in phallogocentrism. The identity is simultaneously formed by language and the social order: "we are children of flesh but also of word, we are nature but also culture".51 She also argues that phallogocentrism is the phallic system from which men can only benefit: "He wants this language, he uses it to ensure him a solid foundation".52

In the same vein, she challenges the hierarchical and binary opposition of the symbolic. By considering woman as the devalued 'other' and man as the master signifier it organizes the sexual differences and sexual identities in the psychological and social order. She also criticizes Freudian psychoanalysis...
which fixes psychic structures through biological deterministic readings of the body and its psycho sexual identities:

"when she discovers through the mother, that the woman does not have the male sex organ, the little girls renounces her own feminine identity and turns to the father, to the man, to obtain the penis through them"; hence, she concludes: "Freudian theory is macho".53

Accordingly, the political implications of her theory are meant to shake the phallogocentric codes which are inscribed in language, and to challenge the metaphysical philosophy of sexual difference between subject/man, and other/woman. But sexual difference is not the only foundation which should be demolished, the sexual opposition in which women are considered in all societies as the inferior 'other' should be challenged as well. On the other hand, she attempts to rediscover or invent the repressed feminine traits and the true female identity that are buried into the soil of western metaphysics: "One would have to dig very deep in order to find, behind the traces of this civilization, this history, the vestiges of a more archaic civilization which could give some indication as to what woman's sexuality is all about".54

On this ground, Irigaray initiates an analysis of de Beauvoir's "refusal to be treated as an other".55 To de Beauvoir women have been regarded and defined as the 'second sex' throughout history. This leads women to be treated as the 'Other': 'She is the Other'.56 De Beauvoir's critical attempts focus on showing that although woman and man are biologically different, this in itself does not prevent a woman from enjoying "the equal sharing of the world".57 Hence she concludes that the exploitation, the oppression and the inferior position of women all stem from the way society turns the duality of the sexes into an unjust difference between the sexes. Being aware of the difference and struggling to dissolve the difference by gaining what men possess and what men are, women could reach the true feminine identity.
Although in "The Question of the Other" Irigaray cherishes de Beauvoir's refusal to be treated as an other, she simultaneously denounces de Beauvoir's critical attempt as 'a significant regression' or as 'a theoretical and practical error'. She contends that De Beauvoir's existentialist philosophy eliminates the differences between the sexes in the light of obtaining an equal share in the socio-economic and political spheres; hence, the latter still considers woman as the other, the other which at best is a good copy of man; that is to say, a true woman is a man as such. Hence, Irigaray argues as follows:

I do not wish to be the other of masculine subject and, in order to escape this secondary position, I claim to be equal to him, I argue: The question of who the other is has not been well formulated in the western tradition, in which the other is always the other of a singular subject and not another subject, irreducible to the masculine subject and of equal dignity.\footnote{58}

Similarly, she questions the reductionist understanding of equality, as it means being equal to the one and only subject, that is to say, the masculine subject: man, father, leader. She argues that the sexes should be two without being first or second. Hence being another or being the 'real other' should be the main goal of the women's movement, which can be achieved not by abolishing the difference between the sexes, but rather by appreciating the difference between them. Accordingly, to Irigaray, the political task would involve cherishing the two, and getting rid of the omnipotent paradigm of the one, since the human species and human culture are made of two subjects and not one.

Because it implies two subjects who should not be situated in either a hierarchical or genealogical relationship, and that these two subjects have the
duty of preserving the human species and of developing its culture, while respecting their differences^59.

Although Irigaray criticizes the difference formulated in Freud and Lacan’s psychoanalysis, she appreciates the difference articulated in French feminist theory. From her point of view, the only way one can speak about women’s liberation, love, democracy, and constituting oneself as an autonomous and different subject would be by asserting the specificities of women.

Hence, we will try to find out the main aspects of the latter difference as a political means of women’s emancipation. We will also deal with the possible questions which may arise, and also examine the approaches that Irigaray adopts in order to grapple with the following questions:

How could human beings and particularly women appreciate the 'difference'? How to ensure that a recognition of the difference would not bring about a hierarchical duality and opposition of the sexes? What are the political implications of the theory of difference for the feminist movement? How could women resist "masculine techne" and lead "the masculine subject back to his own being"^60? What is this 'own being' for both the sexes? Can Irigaray's praise of 'two' and difference in fact bring about a significant and efficient strategy of resistance? And finally, could her alleged emancipatory strategy produce a counter-discourse which is not repressive and restrictive any more?

Validating the centrality of the issue of sexual difference, Irigaray has no choice but to resort to the idea that by nature and apart from all socio-historical-economic determinations, women have some significant potentialities – linguistically, biologically and spiritually. These essential
potentialities could lead women to liberty. Here it would be interesting to mention the famous statement made by Aristotle: "The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities". It seems that Irigaray's innovative radical feminist position lies in a reversal discourse: *The female is a female by virtue of possessing certain qualities*, the qualities that men lack. Irigaray says:

I try to show how life unfolds differently for woman than for man, in that her physical becoming is marked by more crucial stages – puberty, loss of virginity, maternity, menopause, - stages requiring a more complex becoming than that of man.

In this respect, some critics regard her theory of difference as "a valorization of pre-Oedipal female sexuality", and accordingly dismisses her "as hopelessly essentialist in the context of essentialism versus anti-essentialism". And some others advocate her essentialist theory as a strategy for women's empowerment. For example, Diana Fuss argues that laying claim to an essence is not necessarily reactionary, since in traditional Western metaphysics, woman has no essence; and calling for essence could undo "Western Phallomorphism" and offer "women entry into subjecthood".

Hence, it is necessary to examine whether the essentialist strategy and the feminine subjecthood which is constituted in this theory, could, in fact, offer a breath of fresh air to the women’s movement, or it simply reproduces the same discourse which it changes vigorously.

Irigaray’s concern in affirming the difference between men and women and freeing the two from the authority of the One, namely, the masculine subject, lead her to focus on particular features of women's body, sexuality and pleasure: women's sexuality is significantly different from men's fantasies. Its features, by definition, are quite different from that of men and have more
possibilities. In "The Question of the Other", she maintains that in the usage of language, for example, the female subject, the little girl, is congenitally gifted to respect the other, but the male subject authoritatively speaks to the other. The girl says "Mama, can I play with you?" and the boy as a "little leader" says "I want to play ball, I want a little car." To Irigaray, the female subject as a little girl or as an adolescent girl always respects the relationship with the other: "because as a woman, born of woman, with the properties and qualities of a woman, including those associated with giving birth, the little girl finds herself, from birth, better placed to enter into a relationship involving two subjects."^5^ Hence, because of `richness` of their language with which men cannot compete, women can appreciate `dialogue` and democracy. Accordingly, a female subject has a privilege in communicating with the other, which the masculine subject lacks: "Woman knows the other gender better: she engenders it within herself, she mothers it from birth, she nourishes it from her own body, she lives it inside herself in love".6^6^ For man, the other is outside him: `transcendence`; but for a woman the other is inside: `immanence`. In the final analysis, the `better` position, the superiority and the `privilege` are all manifested in the female body, in her sexuality and finally in her language.

She also claims that throughout history, male culture has fetishised women's body and alienated her from her own body and her own pleasures, by convincing her that the particular kind of sexuality corresponds to her desire and pleasure. The sexuality which, to Irigaray, leads women to a masochist prostitution of her body:

She experiences vicarious pleasure there [man's fantasies], but this pleasure is above all a masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own and that leaves her in her well-known state of dependency. Not
knowing what she wants, ready for anything, even asking for more, if only he will 'take' her as the 'object' of his pleasure.67

Irigaray's strategy is to free the female subject from male domination which imposes a perpetual control over her body, desire, pleasure and finally her sexual identity; the control which brings about the traditional opposition between "viril clitoral activity" and "feminine vaginal passivity"68, between women's dependency and men's independence.

Hence, she tries to explore how the authentic articulation of female pleasure and experience constitute oneself as an autonomous and different subject who is not dependent and passive any more. Through her emancipatory strategic definition of women's sexuality, woman's sex is made of two, two lips, which touch each other continually and satisfy each other, independent of penile penetration: autoeroticism as a true alternative for the alienating heteroeroticism:

Woman's autoeroticism is very different from man's. He needs an instrument in order to touch himself: his hand, woman's genitals, language – And this self-stimulation requires a minimum of activity. But a woman touches herself by and within herself directly, without mediation, and before any distinction between activity and passivity is possible. A woman '-touches herself' constantly without anyone being able to forbid her to do so, for her sex is composed of two lips which embrace continually. Thus, within herself she is already two - but not divisible into ones- who stimulate each other?69

In brief, Irigaray's main approach focuses on two spheres. On the one hand, she valorizes the difference between the sexes, appreciating the two rather than the One, by attributing the different traits, linguistically and
biologically, to the female subject: woman has the potentiality of respecting the others, communicating with the others, and finally experiencing the democracy that the male subject lacks, because she in herself is two and the other is part of her. On the other hand, in the sphere of sexuality, woman’s genitals are made of two, since she does not need the other's intervention to satisfy her, the feature that man lacks: "the other is part of her and is autoerotically familiar to her".70

In fact, in reacting to the classic opposition of female passive dependency/male active autonomy, she just reverses the direction of the analysis. Hence, the two in her philosophy is reduced to the one, this time, to the female subject. The one is composed of two: "We [women] are always one and the other."71

Therefore, in her decoding strategy, the oppositions between the sexes, the classic split between us/them, woman/man and finally friend/enemy which are assumed to be demolished, reestablished and survived. In other words, in her apparent new philosophical equation, the values are the same, but with a rather minor displacement. Pay attention to the statements, particularly the words 'us', 'we', 'our' and 'their' extracted from the article of "When our lips speak together": 'no extent that makes us women', 'It is not that we have our own territory, but that their [Men's] nation, family, home', 'How can we speak to escape their enclosures...', "Between us, there are no owners", 'Between us, hardness is not the rule'... [my emphasis].

Then I could summarize her feminist philosophy as follows: in our feminine community, because of the same language, the same body, the same pleasure, the same sexuality and the same innocence, we could respect and love the other, namely the other of our cast: I love you: our two lips can not part to let one word pass [...] she who loves, she who is loved.72
In the model, women, by definition, would be liberated from male control, they will be considered superior and enjoy their sexuality without suffering any "lack". And men are inferior, because of their dependent sexuality and their congenital lack of linguistic and democratic potentiality. Although cherishing the two, she appeals to the one as a unique liberating force. And in spite of attempting to decode the Symbolic and its reifying laws that bind women, Irigaray could not avoid recoding women's body by the new codes which she attributes to the true feminine subjecthood. If a woman recognizes the new codes, the new feminine principles, the new disciplines in the name of tactics, she will be included in `us`, otherwise she will be excluded as an alienated proletarian in the patriarchal 'trade market':

Let women tactically go on strike, avoid men long enough to learn to defend their desire notably by their speech, let them discover the love of other women protected from that imperious choice of men which puts them in a position of rival goods, [...] these are certainly indispensable steps in their efforts to escape their proletarization on the trade market.73

Hélène Cixous74

Helene Cixous maintains that 'there is no such a thing as 'destiny', 'nature', or essence, but living structures, caught up, sometimes frozen within historic cultural limits which intermingle with the historical scene to such a degree that it has long been impossible and is still difficult to think or even to imagine something else."75 She believes that women in all cultures are subordinated to general hierarchies, general structures, which consider women as passive; hence, femininity is associated with powerlessness. The hierarchical structures, understood in terms of Derrida's theory, are based on logocentric
binaries of "man/woman", "activity/passivity", "culture/nature", "Day/night", "Head/Heart", "Father/Mother", "logos/pathos" which are embedded in western culture. Accordingly, logocentrism corresponds to phallogocentrism in which the traditional definition of sexual difference is inscribed. She also attacks Freud's and Lacan's theories which represent women in terms of the lack brought about by castration, or symbolic castration. She contends that although the sexual difference has psychological repercussions, the way Freud and Lacan perceived it — through anatomical difference between the sexes, the primacy of phallic sexuality as the master signifier and valorization of unitary symbol of power — is reductionist. Freud's theory of castration anxiety brings about opening the road to the exclusion of women from the masculine realms, namely history and philosophy. To Freud, men could sublimate their fears and anxieties, but women live with the loss constantly. Accordingly, Cixous concludes that "women inhabit the place of silence" and "remain outside knowledge". And in "Sorties" she argues:

Freud moreover starts from what he calls the anatomical difference between sexes. And we know how it is pictured in his eyes: as the difference between having/not having the phallus. With reference to these precious parts. Starting from what will be specified, by Lacan, as the transcendental signifier.

To Derrida, différence refers to both differing and deferring. Hence, a signifier does not refer to an everlasting signified, and 'woman' does not have a fixed signified, rather its meaning is in suspense and it conveys an endless multiplicity of referents. Accordingly, Cixous sought to go beyond the dichotomy of signifier and signified by challenging the dictatorship of logocentric ideology. In such an ideology, the sexual difference is reduced to a
deterministic definition of sexuality in which woman has the inferior position to man. But her feminist project is not restricted to challenging Lacan's acceptance of the phallic order, or to adopting Derrida's disruptive deconstruction of logocentric dualities. She proposes 'feminine writing' or ecriture féminine, as an emancipatory act. Feminine writing can use poetic language to dismantle the univocal meaning of the signifier by making the meaning of the words plural and unequivocal. This potentiality leads not to the hierarchal homogenous difference of psychoanalysis, but to a desirable heterogeneous différence. And it is in this very différence, that the jouissance⁷⁹, the erotic drives of the feminine body could be revealed from the rhythms and ambiguities of the text:

No, it is at the level of sexual pleasure [jouissance] in my opinion that the difference makes itself most clearly apparent in as far as woman's libidinal economy is neither identifiable by a man nor referable to the masculine economy⁸⁰.

Hence, her political ambition lies in disrupting and deconstructing the masculine discourse and disrupting the patriarchal institutions which impose upon women the single masculine oppressive regulation of self with self and self with the other. From her point of view, the potentiality of disruption and deconstruction of essentialist structures is embedded not in the symbolic order, the rational homogenous consciousness, rather it lies in the heterogeneous, multiple and unclassifiable features of the female unconscious, women's imaginary:

You can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogenous, classifiable into codes – any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling
another. Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible. 

On the other hand, Cixous contends that woman's sexuality is not single, and could not be reduced to a single sex or gender; rather it contains different qualities. Opposing the monosexual phallocentrism, she favors bisexuality as the possibility of experiencing plural sexualities which could open the road to women's liberation from the mono-phallocentric sexuality; their potentiality is gifted to women not men:

Now it happens that at present, for historic-cultural reasons, it is women who are opening up to and benefiting from this vatic bisexuality which doesn't annul differences but stirs them up, pursues them, increases their number in a certain way, 'woman is bisexual'; man - it's a secret to no one- being poised to keep glorious phallic mono sexuality in view.

On the other hand, Helen Cixous, like Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva argues that the patriarchal system is huge. It makes women see or experience what men want to see or experience of them [women]. Hence, women always live under the general dictatorship of male uniform interdiction which deprives them, through the whole history and in all cultures, of "power, authority, money, or pleasure".

Like the other French feminists, Cixous seeks to revive the imaginary, which is repressed in terms of Lacan's theory of the Symbolic. The imaginary which is considered as a pre-verbal or non-verbal stage, is the pre oedipal realm before the child's entrance into the realm of the Symbolic, the realm of the Law of the Father, the realm of language and culture. According to Lacan, the symbolic order is brought about by the intervention of the father, interrupting the unity of mother-child. Whereas the bond between child and
mother is disrupted, the bond between father and language is strengthened. Hence it is argued that the symbolic, by its repressive laws, imprison the unconscious, the imaginary, and its nonverbal desires. On the other hand, the imaginary is free from the concept of Lack in which the symbolic is engaged. And it is the feminine writing which has the possibility of liberating the unconscious and its related imaginary from the chains of the Symbolic:

It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence.\textsuperscript{84}

Hence, writing could be a medium through which the women's imaginary would emerge. Articulating a non-verbal imaginary, Cixous theorizes an \textit{anti-logos} formulation in which women could express themselves freely: "To write and thus to forge for herself the anti-logos weapon"; and she adds: "listen to a woman speak at a public gathering [...] She doesn't 'speak', she throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies".\textsuperscript{85}

Although Cixous criticizes Lacan's theory of the formation of human identity, she does not dismantle his theory fundamentally. She seeks to \textit{deconstruct} the male theory in order to \textit{construct} the new female one, by discovering the lost jouissance from the thick sediments of patriarchy. In other words, her main ambition focuses on curing the Symbolic disease by the Imaginary-therapy, through which a woman becomes the heroine of the call and her voice which is silenced for centuries can be heard: "everywhere in the cultures, it is the son who is the hero of the call".\textsuperscript{86}
By now, we have seen, more or less, the same line of analysis shared among the French feminist canon. But to me, what makes Cixous’s argument different from her counterparts is her ambiguous and playful literature grounded on the emancipatory solutions. It is felt that referring to the statements which describe women's body, women's libido, and women's writing derived from her different works, would be interesting: "A woman who is neither doll nor corpse nor dumb nor weak. But beautiful, lofty, powerful, brilliant", "...her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide. Her writing can only keep going, without ever inscribing or discerning contours" or "it is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing".

By reading the words, even as a woman reader, one could not easily decide or understand what 'woman' is and what the feminine writing and femininity could exactly and universally be defined. And it is the mysterious way of analyzing which sounds to me very seductive – in its strict sense! Cixous is intelligently aware of the risks of theorizing and codifying women's body, pleasure and writing explicitly. She knows well how any codification and formulation of feminine libido could bring about the regulations and mechanisms working at the service of new "Law", the law which includes some and excludes the other.

By the same token, "The Laugh of Medusa" has a very slippery texture: The moment one catches a point, it will easily slip out of one's hands. Besides, I could not deny as a "woman", the extent of ecstasy of joy and self esteem I felt at the time of reading the text. I was momentarily in a hallucination of being powerful, out of any power relations, since I have been said:
Our blood flows and we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end; we never hold back our thoughts, our signs, our writing; and we are not afraid of lacking. [My emphasis].

While reading this text I was at the peak of the mountain of success and truth. I was continuously told that, as a "woman" and as a "writer", I have to inscribe the very minor experiences of life, work, love and sex in order to share them with my "sisters". We have something "in common", we have no "lack", we are "not castrated", we are distinctive and different "from them" [men]. I also have been reminded that my writing is "bisexual" and accordingly plural; whenever I write I cut myself "out of paper penis". I have constantly been told that feminine writing is grounded on the "decensored relation of woman to her sexuality", through which I could give back my "pleasure", "organs" and my "bodily territories" which have been kept "under seal" throughout history. I also have to bear in mind that I am more generous and more spiritual than man "who holds so dearly to his title [...] ,his cap, crown, and everything connected with his head". I have been taught that I have no penis envy I do "not fear any risk", I do not "deny", I do not "hate", and I "will never be lacking". I, as a woman, have also the possibility of deconstructing the law, the Symbolic, the discourse of man from "within". I have the power of laughing at "silence". I don't care about lack, about castration: I "let others toy with it". And it may seem that the repeated "I" may refer to the feminine transcendental identification, but who cares, and it "doesn't mean we'll succumb".

But the pleasant dream turns into a nightmare and the story reaches its tragic culmination by reminding us that the "number of women writers [...] has been ridiculously small" and the majority of these writers has produced works which are in "no way different from male writing".
Alas, the ecstasy of Medusa disappeared disappointingly by the slap of sobriety, because I noticed that "so few women have yet won back their body". Hence, if I am supposed to be a true woman and my writing sealed under the mark of true feminine writing, I have to avoid reproducing "the classical representations of women, as sensitive – intuitive – dreamy, etc." I have to bear in mind that the only inscriptions which could deserve to be marked as feminine writing are the works of "Colette, Marguerite Duras… and Jean Genet." Then in spite of all appreciation of the female libido, and all cautionary statements, the road to emancipation seems uneven:

On the one hand, although the true femininity and the true female identity are grounded on the female unconscious, the imaginary, the dreams, sensations, pleasures and even the intuitions of the pre-discursive realm, one consciously has to avoid writing according to the representation of women as sensitive, intuitive and dreamy; since, they are the features that the male tradition requires women to produce! If I write rationally, logically and reasonably, I may be labeled as a male writer, for adopting the infamous features which traditionally belong to masculine literature. Then how can I write, and how can I speak out, in such a way as to include myself in the small group of authentic women and exclude myself from the fake feminine majority. "so few How can I also evaluate the other women, and their productions according to these ambiguous criteria?

On the other hand, I ask myself why I have to speak out, why I have to write down, why I have to share my most private feelings, pleasures and experiences with `others` with my sisters. Why do I have to police my writing and speaking to check out whether my productions conform to the standard of rare feminine archetypes. Why do I have to seeks to writing orthopedics. And in terms of which power apparatus do I have to participate in an ever
lasting confession session; if the silence is my ethic or even my tactical weapon, not my strategic one, and if I prefer... if I..., if...

The ecstasy of power vanishes and the sobriety of probable imperfection takes its place. Then, I slowly feel a sort of fear, a kind of anxiety about whether as a woman I have a 'lack'. Do I have the true feminine identity, or do I just possess the fake male one. I notice that I have neither had an anxiety of lacking a penis, nor had the penis castration fear. But, from now on, I may toy with the new castration which I call 'the vaginal castration'. I always have to check out – as I am not certain anymore – that my body, pleasure, libido, sexuality and writing correspond with the new, unnamable, regionalized standard femininity, with the new discourse, the Law of the Mother.

Although consciously trying to avoid codifying women's body, pleasure and writing, Cixous unconsciously and inevitably seeks to recodify women's libido by distinguishing between the true feminine and the false feminine. Hence, the project of dismantling the symbolic and deconstructing the classic oppositions brings about just a reversal of the values of the hierarchies, in which speaking, the conscious, the head and the masculine are replaced by writing, the unconscious, the heart and the feminine. The same and familiar line of analysis: the oppressor/man as the negative character of the whole history has to be overthrown by the innocent oppressed/woman of the `all cultures`.

Foucault explicitly takes a position against the one-dimensional, universal and insufficient models of sexuality. According to him, since the seventeenth century, there has been a constant proliferation of discourses related to sex; there has been an institutional incitement to speak about sex, rather than silence or censorship. Then why "we convince ourselves that we have never said enough on the subject". There have been different apparatuses and manifold mechanisms to produce increased quantities of sex. Rather than one
Master oppressing sex, in other words, there has been a multiplicity of sexual discourses. There has never been a natural, prediscursive and innocent sexuality, in opposition to an oppressive prevailing discourse on sexuality. Accordingly, he contends that resorting to 'repression' as the only analytical tool or 'writing' as the only means of resistance is nothing but betraying the struggle. Foucault says:

A whole series of misunderstandings relates to things that are "bidden," "repressed," and "unsaid"; and they permit the cheap "psychoanalysis" of the proper objects of struggle. It is perhaps more difficult to unearth a secret than the unconscious. The two themes frequently encountered in the recent past, that "writing gives rise to repressed elements" and that "writing is necessarily a subversive activity," seem to betray a number of operations that deserve to be severely denounced. 98

Then why is sexuality still conceived as constant and singular? Why is any definition of sexuality associated with the hypothesis of repression and interdiction? And how is power, for a long time, considered in terms of the juridical conception of power, power as a rule, prohibition, censorship and law – Law of the Father? He asks:

How is it that our society, Western society in general, has conceived power in such a restricted, such a poor as such a negative way? Why do we always conceive power as law and as prohibition, why this privileging? 99

And how are we still appealing to the uniform forms of rationality or apparent irrationality to guarantee a certain identity, and why do we need a fixed and essential identity as the only weapon to struggle, the most
insufficient one? And finally why feminists like Irigaray still resort to the
women's specificities as an emancipatory model: "How we can govern the
world as women if we have not defined our identity, the rules concerning our
genealogical relationships, our social, linguistic and cultural order?" 100

Notes

1. Michel Foucault, "The ethics of the concern of the self as a practice of freedom", Ethics: Subjectivity and
2. Judith Butler's argument in Gender Trouble in opposition to Kristeva's theory. P. 80.
3. The quotations are from Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", Aesthetics, Method, and
6. Ibid., p. 28.
7. Slavoj Zizek, Interrogating the Real, trans. by Rex Butler & Scott Stephens (London & New York:
9. Ibid.,
10. Quoted in French Feminist Theory, p. 31.
13. Ibid., p. 31.
15. Ibid., 34.
16. Quoted in French Feminist Theory, p. 34.
17. Ibid.
18. Quoted in French Feminist Theory., p. 35.
20. Julia Kristeva (born 1941 in Bulgaria) is a linguist, cultural theorist and practicing analyst. She began her
career in Paris. Since then, Kristeva has earned a reputation as a major figure of French feminism. Following
Lacan, she contends that the subject is constituted by language. Then, she offers a revision of his model and emphasizes on the semiotic, pre-Oedipal stage, rather than on the semantic stage which corresponds to the Oedipal stage.


23. Ibid., p. 117.

24. Ibid., p. 137.


27. Saussure argues that the signifying system works through the process of difference. And on the psychoanalytic model of Freud and Lacan, the child enters the language and the social out of fear of castration. The child experiences its separation from the mother’s body with the Oedipal conflict as a tragic event, as a loss, as a Lack. But Kristeva contends that separation begins prior to the Oedipal situation, and it is not tragic anymore, rather it is pleasurable —by cutting the umbilical cord and being weaned. And all this which is called 'abjection' helps, Kristeva argues, the child to enter the language not in the terms of paternal threat but because of paternal love.

28. *The Feminine and the Sacred*, p.16

29. Quoted in *Gender Trouble*, p. 83.


32. Ibid., P. 26.

33. Ibid., P. 27.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., p. 31.

36. Ibid., P. 34.

37. Ibid., 31.

38. Ibid.


41. J. Kristeva, "Might Not Universality Be... Our Own Foreignness?", p. 233.

42. Ibid.

43. Here, I cannot avoid observing the affinity between Habermas’s account of psychoanalysis and Kristeva’s theory. He attempts to develop the notions of emancipation and self reflection through the model of psychoanalysis whose task is transforming the unconscious to conscious; while Kristeva puts the
responsibility on the shoulder of consciousness which has to recognize the unconscious. In other words, it is in
the very process of recognition corresponding to the concept of self reflection that the emancipation of men
lies. Although examining the similarities between liberal thought and the feminist approach would be
interesting, it would become too distanced from the main object of this research.
44. Just bear in mind Badiou’s conceptualization of the Real-Eden before the subject’s Fall into the Symbolic.
45. Gender Trouble, p. 85.
46. Gender Trouble, p. 88.
47. Gender Trouble, p. 91.
49. “Born in Belgium, Luce Irigaray is a philosopher and practicing analyst who works in Paris. A former
member of the Freudian School, Irigaray was expelled from Lacan’s charmed circle after the publication of
Speculum of the other woman in 1974. It has been suggested that Lacan disapproved of Irigaray’s feminist
critique of psychoanalysis.” (The text is derived from Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories, edited by Lorraine
50. Luce Irigaray, “The Sex which is not One”, New French Feminisms, trans. Claudia Reeder (New York:
Schoken, 1981), P.103.
52. Quoted in French Feminist Theory, p. 93.
54. L. Irigaray, "The Sex which is not One", p. 101.
57. Ibid., p. 36.
58. L. Irigaray, "The Question of the Other", p. 84.
59. Ibid., p. 86.
60. Ibid., p.87.
62 . L. Irigaray, "The question of the other", p. 87.
275.
64. Quoted in Lois McNay, Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self (Boston: Northeastern
65. L. Irigaray, "The Question of the Other", p. 89.
66. Ibid., p. 90.
68. Ibid., p. 99.
69. Ibid., p. 100.
70. Ibid., p. 105.
72. Ibid., p.72.
73. L. Irigaray, "The Sex which Is not One", p. 106.
74. Hélène Cixous (born 1937 in Algeria) known as one of the leading exponents of French feminism in 1970s. Criticizing the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan, she attacks the Law that represents woman in terms of the lack brought about by symbolic castration. Influenced by Jacques Derrida, she proposes a practice of writing that dismantles the essentialised dualism of phallogocentrism.
76. Ibid., p. 90.
79. Jouissance, the untranslatable French term, conveys an excess of pleasure. The term is used for orgasmic pleasure. Lacan argues that there is a part of the feminine which exceeds a phallic economy. The concept has been taken up by Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous to imagine the place of women beyond phallogocentrism. (The text is derived from *Encyclopaedia Of Feminist Theories*, p. 280).
82. Ibid., p.254.
85. Ibid., pp.250-251.
89. Ibid., p. 253.
90. Ibid., 248.
91. Ibid., p. 259.
92. Ibid., p. 248.
93. Ibid., p. 256.
94. Ibid., p. 248.
95. Ibid., P. 249.
The concept is inspired by Foucault's *discursive orthopedics*. He says: "a certain reasonable, limited, canonical, and truthful discourse on sex was prescribed for him - a kind of discursive orthopedics". (The *History of Sexuality*, Volume I, 1990, Vintage Book Edition, p.29).


Michel Foucault, "Intellectuals & Power": A conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, appeared in http://libcom.org/library/intellectuals-power-a-conversation-between-michel-foucault-and-gilles-deleuze


Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, trans. Alison Martin (London & New York: Rop. 51.)