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Where Does the Misery Come From? Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Event

Jacqueline Rose

A classical political dichotomy, not without relevance for feminism, is captured by the question Wilhelm Reich placed at the heart of his dispute with Freud in a conversation with Kurt Eissler in 1952: "From now onward, the great question arises: *Where does that misery come from?* And here the trouble began. While Freud developed his death-instinct theory which said 'The misery comes from inside,' I went out, out where the people were."[1] We can immediately recognize the opposition that is central to Reich's complaint: between a misery that belongs to the individual in her or his relation to her- or himself, which is also, in Freud's theory of the death instinct, a species relationship, and a misery that impinges on the subject from the external world and that therefore refers to a social relationship. Here, the dynamic is not internal to the subject but passes between the subject and the outside, an outside that has direct effects upon psychic processes but is seen as free of any such processes itself. And we can see too the easy slide from that opposition to another that so often appears alongside it in political debate: the opposition between misery conceived as a privatized, internalized angst (the product of a theory that, like the psyche it describes, is *turned in on itself*) and the people, "out where the people were," that is, where it is really happening, with the poeple. These people who are outside, the place from which Reich claims to speak, have, therefore, two different meanings. They are outside of psychoanalysis seen as a socially delimiting and self-blinding

[1]Wilhelm Reich, *Reich Speaks of Freud. Conversations with Kurt Eissler*, ed. Mary Higgins and C. M. Raphael (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1967), 42–43, hereafter cited in the text.

institution but also—and this second meaning follows from the first—they themselves only *have* an outside, since whatever they are and suffer is a direct effect of a purely external causality and constraint. Reich's question to Freud, with its dichotomy between inside and outside, thus contains within it two more familiar versions of the opposition by means of which politics is pitted against psychoanalysis: the opposition between public and private (the people versus analytic space) and between social and the psychic (social oppression versus the drive to death).[2]

In Reich's case, as we know, these views resulted in the gradual repudiation of any concept of psychic dynamic and the unconscious in favor of the notion of a genital libido, dammed up or blocked off by a repressive social world, a natural stream that "you must get back into its normal bed and let it flow naturally again" (44). This essentially pre-Freudian and normative concept of sexuality reveals the most disturbing of its own social consequences in Reich's attacks on perversion, homosexuality, Judaism, and women, together with the inflation of his own sexual prowess which accompanied them: "It is quite clear that the man who discovered the genitality function in neurosis and elaborated the orgastic potency question could not himself live in a sick way" (104). This moment lays down the terms of the most fundamental political disagreement with psychoanalysis, which then finds one of its sharpest representations in a much more recent and more obviously feminist political debate in relation to Freud, whose underlying issue perhaps becomes clear only through a comparison between the two moments. Kurt Eissler has the distinction (dubious, fortunate, or unfortunate, depending on which way you look at it) not only of having conducted that interview with Reich in 1952 but also of later becoming the key figure within the analytic institution in what has come to be known as the Jeffrey Masson dispute, personally giving Masson access to the archives through which he mounted his critique of Freud. Masson's critique—in which he challenges Freud on the relinquishment of the seduction theory of neurosis in favor of fantasy and the vicissitudes of psychic life—is expressed quite unequivocally in terms of the same dichotomy between inside and outside: "By shifting the emphasis from an actual world of sadness, misery, and cruelty to an internal stage on which actors performed invented dramas for an invisible audience of their own creation, Freud began a trend away from the real world that, it seems to me, is at the root of the present-day sterility of psychoanalysis

[2]The key text in which Freud introduced the concept of the death drive is *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920).

and psychiatry throughout the world."[3] If the dichotomy appears this time as a feminist issue, it is because the aggression of the outside world has been stepped up and sexually differentiated and is now conceived of in terms of seduction, mutilation, and rape.

The similarities between these two moments are, I think, striking. We can point to the inflated view of sexual prowess, which in relation to Masson—the famous and now legally contested reference to his thousand and one nights[4]—merely mirrors in reverse the grotesque image of masculinity which runs through the whole book. What the two have in common is the utterly unquestioned image of sexual difference whose rigidity is, I would argue, the real violence and, in Masson's case—with a logic to which he is of course totally blind—leads directly to it. Reich also had his image of sexual violence, only the other way round: the misogyny-cum-vampirism worthy of Henry James's *The Sacred Fount* which can be detected in his observation that he has frequently observed couples in which the man is "alive," the woman "somehow out," inhibiting then drawing off, by implication, his vitality and power (117). But most important is that we can detect behind these two moments (the Reich and Masson disputes) this question of violence, which presents itself today as an explicitly feminist political issue but which was already there in the dispute over the death drive at the centre of the earlier political repudiation of Freud.

It is this issue of violence, and with it that of the death drive, which has become a key issue for any consideration of psychoanalysis in relation to feminism today. Clearly, the question of sexual violence is crucial to feminism in the 1980s (violence is, of course, also a political issue in a much more global sense). It is central to the discussion of pornography, to take just one instance. Reich himself spoke of the pornographic drives, although for him they were not a part of genital sexuality but the effect of a deviation from it. But Masson's book can, I think, be read as a key pornographic text of the 1980s as well as a text on pornography, much in the same way as we can, or have to, read Andrea Dworkin's writing on pornography, a form of feminism to which Masson now explicity claims allegiance.[5]

[3]Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth, Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1984), 144.

[4]In 1983 Janet Malcolm interviewed Jeffrey Masson and used the material as the basis for two articles published first in the *New Yorker* and then as a book, *In the Freud Archives* (New York: Knopf, 1984). Masson subsequently sued Malcolm. The reference here is to his statement that he had slept with a thousand women.

[5]Chris Reed, "How Freud Changed His Mind and Became a Chauvinist," Guardian Woman, *Guardian*, 20 February 1985. Masson had also published a long article in the radical feminist journal *Mother Jones*.

For isn't the argument finally that psychoanalytic theory, by ignoring the pressing reality of sexual violence, becomes complicit with that violence and hands women over to it? Isn't the argument therefore that theory itself can cause death? And isn't that merely one step on from Reich's insistent relegation of all death to the outside, which then, in a classic inversion, leads directly to this persecutory return, for which psychoanalysis is held accountable? Reich himself was clearly operating in some such terms as this: "[Freud] sensed something in the human organism which was deadly. But he thought in terms of instinct. So he hit upon the term 'death instinct.' That was wrong. 'Death' was right. 'Instinct' was wrong. Because it's not something the organism wants. It's something that happens to the organism" (89).

Where to locate violence? This was the question sensed in all its difficulty in that earlier political debate. It is worth looking back at that moment to see how it was played out. What then emerges is that violence is not something that can be located on the inside or outside, in the psychic or the social (the second opposition, which follows so rapidly from the first), but rather something that appears as the effect of the dichotomy itself. I want to suggest that feminism, precisely through its vexed and complex relationship with psychoanalysis, may be in a privileged position to recast this problem, refusing the rigid polarity of inside and outside together with the absolute and fixed image of sexual difference which comes with it and on which it so often seems to rely. But I also want to suggest why the feminist undoing of this polarity needs to be different from other deconstructions that might be and have been proposed, especially because of the form of feminism's still-for-me-necessary relationship to psychoanalysis itself.

So where does violence go to if you locate it on the outside? In Reich's case, in a structure reminiscent of foreclosure, it returns in a hallucinatory guise. His insistence on the utter health of the subject brings murder in its train:

> In order to get to the core where the natural, the normal, the healthy is, you have to get through the middle layer. And in that middle layer there is terror. There is severe terror. Not only that, there is murder there. All that Freud tried to subsume under the death instinct is in that middle layer. He thought it was biological. It wasn't. It's an artefact of culture. It is a structural malignancy of the human animal. Therefore before you can get through to what Freud called Eros or what I call orgonotic streaming or plasmatic excitation, you have to go through hell. . . . All these wars, all the chaos now—do you know what that is to my mind? *Humanity is trying to get at its core, at its living, healthy core. But before it can be reached, humanity has to pass through this phase of murder, killing and destruction.* (109)

This is apocalyptic—a kind of hideous born-again anticipation of that vision of a necessary hell put forward by some of the most extreme proponents of the New Right. It expels terror into the outer zone and then brings it back as a phase of human development, a catharsis whose purgatorial nature is not concealed by the concept of cultural artefact through which Reich tries to bring it to ground. Horror in Reich's argument operates at two levels. It is the product of culture (something that happens to the organism) and it is part of a vision (something his own language so clearly desires). But that link between two absolute outsides—one relegated to something called culture and the other to the nether depths of all humanity and all history—is not, I suspect, unique to Reich.

Against these rigid extremes, what Reich could not countenance was contradiction—the contradiction of subjectivity in analytic theory and the contradiction that, if it has any meaning, is the only meaning of the death drive itself. For a theory that pits inside and outside against each other in such deadly combat wipes out any difference or contradiction on either side: the subject suffers, the social oppresses, and what is produced, by implication, is utter stasis in each. At one level Freud's concept of the death drive was also about stasis—the famous return to the inorganic which indeed hands the concept over to biology and determinism alike. But if we follow the theorization through, deliberately avoiding the *fort-da* game through which it is most often rehearsed, it is the oscillation of position, the displacement of psychic levels and energies, which the concept of the death drive forces on the theory, the problem it poses in relation to any notion of what might be primary or secondary, which is striking. Challenging Freud on the concept of masochism, Reich commented: "When I asked him whether masochism was primary or secondary, whether it is turned-back sadism or aggression or a disturbance of aggression outward, or whether it's a primary death instinct thing, Freud, peculiarly, maintained both" (89). The ambiguity of the concept is the concept itself. In the chapter "The Classes of Instinct" in *The Ego and the Id,* Freud addressed the question of whether ambivalence—the transposition of love into hate and its reverse—throws his new dualism of the life and death instincts into crisis. Doesn't the shifting of one form of affect into another suggest a form of energy characterized by nothing other than the form of its displacements? And doesn't that in turn throw into question our understanding of the instinct as such: "The problem of the quality of instinctual impulses and of its persistence throughout their various vicissitudes is still very obscure."[6]

[6]Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id,* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works,* ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1953–74), 19:40–47, p. 44.

What Reich therefore misses in his biology/culture opposition is that the theorization of the death instinct shows the instinct itself at its most problematic. For it gives us Freud articulating most clearly the concept of the *drive,* that is, a drive that is only a drive, because of its utter indifference to any path it might take. Freud uses the erotic cathexis and its indifference to the object as the model for this dynamic, but in a twist that mimics the very process he describes, the reference to Eros leads him straight into the arms of death:

> [This trait] is found in erotic cathexes, where a peculiar indifference in regard to the object displays itself. . . . Not long ago, Rank published some good examples of the way in which neurotic acts of revenge can be directed against the wrong people. Such behaviour on the part of the unconscious reminds one of the comic story of the three village tailors, one of whom had to be hanged because the only village blacksmith had committed a capital offense. Punishment must be exacted even if it doesn't fall upon the guilty.[7]

This utterly random *drive to* punishment links up with the concept of a *need for* punishment, the very concept Reich so criticized because it contradicted the earlier libidinal theory, which had stated that sexual desire does not seek punishment but fears it (the theory of repression). It was this concept of a need for punishment which upset Reich's conception of a purely extraneous causality (suffering as an external event). Freud summed it up in his observation in "The Economic Problem of Masochism," written immediately after *The Ego and the Id:* "It is instructive, too, to find, contrary to all theory and expectation, that a neurosis which has defied every therapeutic effort may vanish if the subject becomes involved in the misery of an unhappy marriage, or loses all his money, or develops a dangerous organic disease."[8] Of course, if it weren't all so deadly serious, what is most noteworthy about this, as with the story of the village tailors, is the utter comedy of it all.

In following these arguments, I should make it clear that I am not suggesting simply that the psychic dimension should be prioritized over the cultural and biological determinism of Reich (which turn out finally to be the same thing within Reich's own theory, since the concept of cultural repression depends on that of a preordained genital drive). For to argue in these terms leads almost inevitably to the reverse dualism of Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel and Bela Grunberger's book on

[7]Ibid., 45.

[8]Sigmund Freud, "The Economic Problem of Masochism," *Standard Edition,* 19:166.

Reich, which opposes to Reich's refusal of internal factors, psychic processes that they directly and with unapologetic reductionism make the determinant of social life. Also, although they insist on the difficulty of the internal factors and on that basis criticize Reich's glorification of the id, they do so in terms of a reality-differentiating ego, which has to succumb to the constraints on instinct offered by the real world, and thereby hand the concept of psychic conflict over to that of adaptation to reality—which might explain the defense of maturation, Oedipus, and sexual difference, not to mention the dismissal of all politics as reality-denying, which seems to follow.[9] The book ends with two quotations "Wo es war soll ich werden" ("Where id was, there ego shall be": Freud) and "Wo ich war soll es werden" ("Where ego was, there id shall be": roughly Reich), the first much-contested, much-interpreted statement presented unproblematically as the "goal of the analytic process" (237). The statement "Wo es war soll ich werden" was of course the phrase retranslated by Lacan from Strachey precisely because of the normative ethics of ego and adaptation it implied.[10] The implication is that Reich wanted to replace ego with id, whereas the objective of analysis should be the reverse. Faced with this, one might concede that Reich had an important point.

But what emerges instead in looking at Freud's theory of the death drive is precisely the impasse it produces in Freud's own thought around this very issue of location and dualism, to which I would want to assign both more and less than Derrida who makes of it in *La carte postale* the exemplary demonstration of the impasse of theorization itself (of metalanguage, knowledge, and mastery),[11] thereby evacuating the specific dynamic—of masochism, punishment, and the drive to death—which has historically been, and still is I would argue, the point of the political clash. For the failure to locate death as an object, the outrageous oscillation this failure introduces into causality and the event, signals for me something that has a particular resonance for a feminism wishing to bring the question of sexuality onto the political field: and that is that a rigid determinism by either biology or culture, by inside or outside—an outside that then turns into man posed in his

[9]Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel and Bela Grunberger, *Freud or Reich? Psychoanalysis and Illusion*, trans. Claire Pajaczkowska (London: Free Association Books, 1985), see esp. 10.

[10]Sigmund Freud, "The Dissection of the Psychical Personality," *New Introductory Lectures*, in *Standard Edition*, 22:80; Jacques Lacan, "L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient; ou, La raison depuis Freud," *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), 493–528, p. 524; "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious; or, Reason since Freud," trans. Alan Sheridan in *Ecrits: A Selection* (New York: Norton, 1977), 146–78, p. 171.

[11]Jacques Derrida, *La carte postale: De Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980).

immutable and ahistorical essence as man—simply will not do. Wasn't it precisely to bypass both of these causalities (of culture or of biology) that Juliet Mitchell turned to psychoanalysis in the first place?[12] Then the question was posed in terms of how to understand the origins of femininity and sexual difference (where does sexual difference come from?). To which I would merely add that the question of determinism reveals itself today as the issue of violence and its location (determinism precisely as a violence).

Like Reich before him, Masson insists on the externality of the event, only this time he calls it man. He is perhaps useful only to the extent that he anthropomorphizes the inside/outside dichotomy, turning it unmistakably into an issue of whether it is our (women's) or their (men's) fault. It seems to be the inevitable development of the basic dichotomy, since a reality split off into a realm of antagonism cannot finally be conceptualized as anything other than violence, or perhaps even rape. But to ask for a language that goes over to neither side of this historical antagonism, and to suggest that we might find the rudiments of such a language in the very issue of the death drive, is merely to point to something that is in a way obvious for feminism—the glaring inadequacy of any formulation that makes us as women either pure victim or sole agent of our distress. The realm of sexuality messes up what can be thought of in any straightforward sense as causality. Precisely, then, through its foregrounding of sexuality, feminism may be in a privileged position to challenge or rethink the dualities (inside/outside, victim/aggressor, real event/fantasy) which seem to follow any rigid externalization of political space.

There is, however, another discourse, with its own relation to feminism and to psychoanalysis, which has quite explicitly addressed this polarity of inside and outside, aiming to undo these polarities in which it also locates a violence. This is a violence not against women but against something that can be called the rhetoricity of language, insofar as the binary is always the point at which—under the impact of an impulse to mastery and control—the oscillation and randomness of language is closed off. Not only in Derrida's writing, but also in Shoshana Felman's book on madness and the literary thing, Barbara Johnson's essay on Poe, Lacan, and Derrida, and Samuel Weber's reading of Freud, the specific polarity of inside and outside appears as the stake of their discourse. One quotation from each of them can serve as illustration:

[12]Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (New York: Random House, 1974).

> To state that madness has well and truly become a commonplace is to say that madness stands in our contemporary world for the radical ambiguity on the inside and the outside, an ambiguity which escapes speaking subjects who speak only by misrecognising it. . . . A discourse that speaks of madness can henceforth no longer know whether it is inside or outside, internal or external, to the madness of which it speaks.[13]

> The total inclusion of the "frame" is both mandatory and impossible. The "frame" thus becomes not the borderline between the inside and the outside, but precisely what subverts the applicability of the inside/outside polarity to the act of interpretation.[14]

> The specific problem posed by anxiety is that of *the relation of the psychic to the nonpsychic,* or in other words, *the delimitation of the psychic as such.* But if anxiety poses this problem, its examination and solution are complicated by the fact that anxiety itself both simulates and dissimulates the relation of psychic to nonpsychic, of "internal" to "external." . . . [Freud's attempt] is intended to put anxiety in its proper place. But his own discussion demonstrates that *anxiety has no proper place.* . . . The psychoanalytic conception of the psychic can neither be *opposed* to the nonpsychic nor *derived* from it; it cannot be expressed in terms of cause and effect, outer and inner, reality and unreality, or any other of the opposing pairs to which Freud inevitably recurs.[15]

And at the Conference on Feminism and Psychoanalysis held at Normal, Illinois, in May 1986 Barbara Johnson said in discussion: "For pedagogy, aesthetics, therapy, you have to have a frame, and if you have a frame, what you get is pedagogy, aesthetics, therapy (which doesn't mean that you can do without one)." Now there are obvious differences among these statements and of course among the individual writers, but nonetheless a number of important links—both among them and in relation to what I have been describing—can be made. First, the problem of externality, delimitation, as a problem that encompasses the object—whether madness, literary enunciation, or anxiety—also includes the very theorization through which that object can be thought. The impossibility of delimiting the object becomes, therefore, the impossibility for theory itself of controlling its object, that is, of knowing

[13]Shoshana Felman, *Writing and Madness,* trans. Martha Noel Evans and the author (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 12–13, originally published as *La folie et la chose littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), hereafter cited in the text.

[14]Barbara Johnson, "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida," *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977), 481, hereafter cited in the text.

[15]Samuel Weber, *The Legend of Freud* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 50, 58–59, hereafter cited in the text.

it. Felman asks, "How can we construct the theory of the essential misprision of the subject of theory?" (221). Barbara Johnson: "If we could be sure of the difference between the determinable and the underterminable, the undeterminable would be comprehended within the determinable. What is undecidable is precisely whether a thing is decidable or not" (488). And Weber: "Such a *reality* [the 'real essence of danger'] can never be fully grasped by theoretical 'insight,' since it can never be seen, named or recognised as such" (59).

Second, and as an effect of this, the characterization of the object shifts into the field of its conceptualization, or the impossibility of its conceptualization, so that, in Felman's case, for example, madness becomes precisely *la chose littéraire*, the very *thing* of literature (not *a* literary thing), because literature is the privileged place in which that tension between speaking madness and speaking of madness, between speaking madness and designating or repressing it, which is also the distinction between rhetoric and grammar, is played out. The object becomes the very structure of representation through which it fails to be thought, the impasse of conceptual thinking itself. The classic and dazzling instance of this theorization has to be the moment when Barbara Johnson reads Oedipus as a repetition of the letter purloined from the abyssal and interminable interior of Poe's story, instead of seeing the letter as a repetition of an oedipal fantasy it necessarily and always reproduces (the basis of Derrida's critique of Lacan, in whose reading of the Poe story he locates a classic psychoanalytic reduction) (488).

Third, the shifting of the object into the very form and movement of representation brings with it—cannot, finally, avoid—its own metapsychology. This appears in the category of grammar Felman sets against rhetoric: the misrecognizing subject that thinks—has to think in order to speak—that it knows itself, has to ignore, as she puts it, that radical ambiguity between inside and outside that madness gives us today. But it is in the theorization of the death drive, the vanishing point of the theory, that the metapsychology of this reading of psychoanalysis becomes most clear. In Weber's reading of Freud's key text on the death drive, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), what turns out to be driving the very impulse to death is narcissism, the binding and mastery that Weber identifies not only in the concept of the death drive but also in the very process through which Freud tried to formulate it, "the narcissistic striving to rediscover the same: an aspect of speculation Freud was ready to criticize in others, but which he sought to justify in his own work" (129). It is this emphasis on narcissism which saves the death drive from that intangible, generalized, and ultimately

transcendent realm of the unfathomable to which the insistence on the failure of conceptualization could so easily assign it. Against this possible reading, which he attributes to Gilles Deleuze, Weber sees in the death drive "just another form of the narcissistic language of the ego" (129). It is a kind of self-accusatory ego psychology, one that laments and undoes its own categories and status even as it gives them final arbitration over psychic life.

Something similar goes on in Derrida's own reading of this same text by Freud (Derrida and Weber refer to each other)[16] through the concept of the "pulsion d'emprise," "pulsion de puissance." At a key moment in Derrida's speculation on this most speculative of Freud's writings, this drive emerges as the very motive of the drive itself: "The holding, appropriating, drive must also be the *relation to itself* of the drive: no drive not driven to bind itself to itself and to ensure its self mastery as drive. Hence the transcendental tautology of the appropriating drive: the drive as drive, the drive of drive, the pulsionality of the drive."[17] The concept appears in a term Freud offers almost as an aside in his discussion of the *fort-da* game: *Bemachtingungstrieb*. Freud's "transcendental predicate" for describing the death drive, it is for Derrida, as for Weber, the term through which Freud's own metaconceptual impulse is best thought.[18]

The concept of the death drive has of course been central to Derrida's reading of Freud since "Freud and the Scene of Writing," when it hollowed out Freud's theory at its weak points of binarism through its *umheimlich* presence (as binding and repetition) inside the very process of life. We could in fact say that it is through the theorization of the death drive that Derrida ultimately thinks the relationship between the proper and that *différance* which subverts any causality, any dichotomy of inside and outside, all forms of language mastery in which he locates the violence (his word) of the metaphysical act.[19] Barbara Johnson, too, draws "The Frame of Reference" to a close through the categories of

[16]Derrida, *La carte postale*, 400n; Weber, 172n.

[17]Derrida, *La carte postale*, 430 (my translation).

[18]Derrida, *La carte postale*, 430–32. Although very close, there does seem to be a difference between Weber's and Derrida's theorization here. For Weber the death drive becomes a manifestation of the drive to mastery; for Derrida the "pulsion d'emprise" is the category through which the death drive is thought by Freud, but it is always exceeded by the death drive, "at once the reason and the failure, the origin and the limit of power." Hence in Derrida's commentary, the last word, so to speak, is given to rhythm: "Beyond opposition, the rhythm." (432, 435).

[19]Derrida, "Freud et la scène de l'écriture," *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), 293–340; *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 196–231.

narcissism and death (the inverted message that forces the subject—and reader—up against an irreducible otherness) (503). Let's call deconstruction, for the moment at least, another way of dealing, another "savoir faire," with the death drive itself (using and reformulating Catherine Millot's description of psychoanalysis as a savoir faire with the paternal metaphor) that manages over and again to assert itself at the heart of theoretical and political debate.[20]

Let's note too, for all the distance between them, how the two very different articulations in relation to the death drive I have been describing come uncannily close, how Derrida seems to pick up, or rather produce from within his own theorization, something of the terms present in Reich and later Masson: narcissism as phallogocentrism and the hymen as counterimage, with the relation between them formulated as rupture. Couldn't this also be seen as a grotesque recasting of the world (now Western metaphysics) under the sign of a massive violation, if not rape? "Perpetual, the rape has always already taken place and will nevertheless never have been perpetrated. For it will always have been caught in the foldings of some veil, where any or all truth comes undone."[21] No rape because the hymen is the point where all truth is undone; but always already rape, because always truth, logos, presence, the violence of the metaphysical act.

The act is metaphor or figuration for Derrida; for Masson figuration, or fantasy, is the act (figuration is a denial of the reality of the act). The difference can be seen in the opposite political effects: deconstruction of a sexual binary in language, which then seems, in Derrida's discourse at least, condemned to repeat it, or refusal of language itself in favor of the event. For what is at stake in Masson's rejection of fantasy if not representation as such, the idea of a discourse at odds with itself with no easy relation to the real? And isn't that also the key to the radical feminist critique of pornography, which sees the image as directly responsible for the act? But by setting figuration against the act in my own discourse, I am only too aware of the risk of reintroducing that inside/outside dichotomy which is so often the guarantor of political space. It is a question that has of course been put many times, not least by feminists, to deconstruction itself:

> This raises an important question which should not be overlooked although we haven't the space to develop it to any extent here: the compli-

[20]Catherine Millot, "The Feminine Super-ego," *m/f* 10 (1985): 21–38.

[21]Derrida is commenting on Mallarmé. Jacques Derrida, "La double séance," *La dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 199–318, p. 260; "The Double Session," *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 292.

> cated relationship of a practical politics to the kind of analysis we have been considering (specifically the "deconstructive" analysis implicit in your discussion). . . . Just how one is to deal with the inter-relationship of these forces and necessities in the context of feminine [*sic*—I think this should be "feminist"] struggle should be more fully explored on some other occasion. But let's go on to Heidegger's ontology.[22]

The slip—feminine for feminist—is beautifully expressive of the problem being raised: the absorption of the political (feminist) into the space of representation (feminine). Or as Derrida would insist—as indeed he goes on to insist in the same interview—with reference to a concept like "hymen" or "double chiasmatic invagination of the borders," these terms are present in his own writing as a trope not reducible to the body of the woman as such, at once anchored in and taking off from the recognizable historical reference they inevitably invoke (75).

Crucially however, in both these positions, the problem of how to locate violence and the act brings with it—is inseparable from—the question of how to locate sexual difference. It needed feminism, of course, to make the point.

In three stages, therefore, feminism has returned to and recast the controversies at the heart of the 1920s and 1930s political debate with Freud:[23] first, the issue of phallocentrism, which came originally from within the analytic institution and, in its largely clinical formulation, was at that time marked by the total absence of any political consciousness or critique (it was this criticism that was remade for radical feminism by Shulamith Firestone and Kate Millett in the late 1960s); second, the attempt to use psychoanalysis as a theory of ideology, which had characterized the political Freudians of Berlin.[24] The key figure here is Otto Fenichel, who tried to use psychoanalysis in relation to Marxism without losing, like Reich and the culturalists, the unconscious and sexuality, without sacrificing, like the Vienna and British orthodox analysts, the political challenge to social and sexual norms (Juliet Mitchell's intervention in 1974 is almost an exact retranscription for feminism of this aim.) And finally now, the issue of the death drive, of a violence whose outrageous character belongs so resolutely with its refusal to be located, to be simply identified and then, by

[22]Jacques Derrida and Christie V. McDonald, "Choreographies," *Diacritics* 12 (Summer 1982), 66–76.

[23]For a fuller discussion of this history, see Jacqueline Rose, "Introduction—Feminism and the Psychic," *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986).

[24]See Russell Jacoby, *The Repression of Psychoanalysis: Otto Fenichel and the Political Freudians* (New York: Basic, 1983).

implication, removed (possibly the only meaning of the persistence, or immutability, of the death drive of which it has so often been politically accused). Perhaps one reason why this issue is now so pressing is that, faced with the hideous phenomenon of right-wing apocalyptic and sexual fantasy, the language of interpellation through which we thought to understand something about collective identification is no longer adequate. At the point where fantasy generalizes itself in the form of the horrific, that implied ease of self-recognition gives way to something that belongs in the order of impossibility or shock.

That this is now a key issue for feminism can be read across the very titles of two texts of contemporary feminism: Andrea Dworkin's *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, with all that it implies by way of a one-sided (which means outside of us as women) oppression, violence, and control, and the Barnard papers on sexuality, *Pleasure and Danger*, whose ambiguity allows us at least to ask whether the relation between the two terms is one of antagonism or implication, whether there might be a pleasure *in* danger—a dangerous question in itself.[25] In her opening essay, the editor, Carole Vance, puts the question like this: "The subtle connection between how patriarchy interferes with female desire and how women experience their own passions as dangerous is emerging as a critical issue to be explored" (4). In this formulation, although danger is still something that comes from outside—patriarchy makes female desire dangerous to itself—the terms of femininity, passion, and danger have at least started to move.[26] If the deconstructive way of undoing the sort of dichotomy I have outlined leaves me unsatisfied, therefore, it is not just because of the return of the basic scenario of difference but because I cannot see how it can link back to this equally pressing question for feminists—which is how we can begin to think the question of violence and fantasy as something that implicates us as women, how indeed we can begin to dare to think it at all.

It is the problem increasingly at the heart of Kristeva's more recent work, the concept of abjection (already posed as horror and power), which has led inexorably to the question of feminism and violence, "to extol a centripetal, softened and becalmed feminine sexuality, only to exhume most recently, under the cover of idylls amongst women, the sado-masochistic ravages beneath."[27] In Kristeva's case, this difficulty

[25]Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Perigree, 1981); Carole S. Vance, *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

[26]At a two-day all-women event—"Women Alive"—organized in London on 5–6 July 1986 by the Communist party journal *Marxism Today*, these issues were discussed in session under the title "Is There a Feminist Morality?" and "Guilty Pleasure."

[27]Julia Kristeva, *Histoires d'amour* (Paris: Denoel, 1983), 349.

has produced in turn the no less problematic flight into a paternally grounded identification and love.[28]

The question then becomes: what could be an understanding of violence which, while fully recognizing the historical forms in which it has repeatedly been directed toward women, nonetheless does not send it wholesale out into the real from which it can only return as an inevitable and hallucinatory event? How can we speak the fact that violence moves across boundaries, including that of sexual difference, and not only in fantasy. For only by recognizing that boundaries already shift (not *can* be shifted—the flight into pure voluntarism) can we avoid the pitfalls of a Masson (women as utter victim to the event). And only by seeing this as a problem for subjects who recognize, and in so doing misrecognize, themselves and each other as sexual beings, can we seize this problem at the level of what is still for feminism an encounter between the sexes. For psychoanalysis, this difficulty is precisely the difficulty of sexuality itself, or of the death drive, which might be a way of saying the same thing. It certainly seems to be one of the points of greatest theoretical and political difficulty today.

[28]I discuss these shifts in Kristeva's work more fully in "Julia Kristeva—Take Two," *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986).