

Metaphor or Metonymy? The Question of Essentialism in Cixous

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La métaphore ou la métonymie? Hélène Cixous et la question d'essentialisme

L'essentialisme: la question du même/la même question. Les féministes se trouvent dans une impasse: ou elles postulent une spécificité et se voient accusées d'essentialisme ou elles nient la différence sexuelle et sont accusées de se masculiniser. Hélène Cixous parle d'une écriture au féminin ou d'une économie libidinale où les pulsions orientent le moi vers le monde. Dans la conjoncture historique actuelle, selon Cixous il faut employer les mots "masculine" et "féminin," mais il faut reconnaître qu'ils sont imbriqués dans un réseau d'inscription culturelle. Socialisés et métaphorisés, ses mots font signes et tissent des relations de (re)production. Tout comme Derrida, Cixous déstabilise l'opposition binaire du propre et du figuré dans le langage et la philosophie en exposant leur complicité.

Cixous pose la question à l'envers, selon Binhammer. Est-ce que le corps-signifiant dans le discours sociale peut se détacher du corps objet-concret? Dans l'oscillation entre les deux polarités, la métaphore maternelle fonctionne en tant que catéchèse ou métaphore morte prise au sens propre du "détournement d'un mot de son sens propre." Si au lieu de lire le glissement du corps métaphorique au corps littéral à partir de l'axe de substitution, d'identité, on le lit à partir de l'axe de combinaison, de contiguité (cest-à-dire, de l'axe métonymique), on déplace l'opposition catégorique ou/ou. La métonymie étant le trope qui se rélise uniquement dans une situation historique spécifique afin de compléter le réseau signifiant, Cixous pense la différence différemment pour que "la femme" ne soit plus prisonnière des oppositions catégoriques.

If we keep on speaking the same language together, we're going to reproduce the same history. Begin the same old stories all over

again. Don't you think so? Listen: all around us, men and women sound just the same. The same discussions, the same arguments, the same scenes. The same attractions and separations. The same difficulties, the same impossibility of making connections. The same ... Same ... Always the same. – Luce Irigaray

The word 'woman' holds me captive. I would like to wear it out.
– Hélène Cixous

Feminist theoretical arguments around the issue of essentialism produce endless repetitions of the Same – the same discussions, the same arguments, the same scenes. The scenario is well known: a particular theorist is accused of being “essentialist” and, consequently, her work is not attended to, she is silenced. I believe that the same discussions are repeated because we are entrapped by an either/or dialectic that, once inside, is impossible to escape. Either we posit a female specificity and are accused of essentialism, or we deny difference, demand equality and are accused of becoming men, like Maggie Thatcher. Perhaps this is what Hélène Cixous meant when she declared “The word ‘woman’ holds me captive” (1988, 52). The issue of sexual difference is held captive by the Same, the refusal to think difference differently, in a way that does not endlessly repeat the either/or of essentialism/non-essentialism, that invites a new way of signifying ‘woman’ which will not invoke the same discussions, the same arguments, the same scenes.

Partly, it is a problem of language, a problem of the signified and signifier ‘woman.’ What do we mean when we say woman? Female? Feminine?¹ Or, as Cixous asks in *vivre l'orange*, “How to call myself woman?” (38) How does the adjective of ‘woman’s’ modify ‘writing’? Cixous laments the violence of language, the violence of naming ‘woman’: “I would like to live in a time in which language would not be bound, castrated, intimidated, obliged to obey the false scholars who are true ignoramuses” (1988, 50). She warns against the sort of “forced truth” saying “I am a woman” might produce: “We are closed in, we enclose ourselves, we enwomen [“enferme(r)”] ourselves” (1988, 50). But Cixous’ work is primarily about exploring the possibility of a feminine writing or a writing said to be feminine, of defining and enclosing masculine and feminine libidinal economies and for this she is accused of essentialism. Denying the possibility of

such explorations, though, equally encloses women, for a dogmatic anti-essentialist stance remains in the logic of the Same, a logic of dialectical difference.

The reception of Cixous in Anglo-American² feminist circles exemplifies the sameness evident in the essentialist question. Cixous has received a reputation in Anglo-American feminism as the major proponent of "écriture féminine," arising mainly out of the 1976 appearance in *Signs* of her programmatic essay "The Laugh of the Medusa." Anti-essentialist readings of the article are indicative of the paradox of naming woman: they are a symptom, like the essentialist question in general is a symptom, of the complex issue of the relation of signifiers to signifieds, of words to things. I say that the essentialist question is a symptom because I do not want to simply repeat the same pattern of monological accusations against anti-essentialists, it is not my purpose to critique Toril Moi, partly because I do not feel like the critiques of the critiques get us anywhere, rather they remain in the dualism of taking sides and establishing oppositions. Cixous' reception by Anglo-American feminists indicates the problem of 'woman' in philosophical discourse in general, of the relationship between 'woman' in language and the historical bodies of women.

Anglo-American critiques of Cixous' conception of women's writing revolves around the relationship of writing to women's bodies. In "Laugh of the Medusa" Cixous writes that "woman is never far from "mother" ... She writes in white ink" (881). Anti-essentialists read "white ink" literally, to signify "mother's milk," they interpret Cixous as suggesting a direct link between breast feeding and writing written by biological females. The question of essentialism in Cixous is fundamentally a question about "white ink" or about what she means by "feminine" when she speaks of a feminine libidinal economy and its relation to females. Anti-essentialist critiques are based on a particular reading of the relation of femininity to female which collapses the two into the same, which interprets Cixous as an anatomical determinist. Toril Moi, in *Sexual/ Textual Politics* accuses Cixous of instigating the collapse. On the one hand, Moi reads her as positively anti-essentialist in her Derridean anti-biologism, and critique of binary logic, while, on the other hand, Moi asserts Cixous falls back into biologicistic language. Cixous' biologism according to Moi is caused by a "slippage from 'feminine' to 'female' (or 'woman')" (113). Ann Rosalind Jones in "Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of

l'Écriture féminine", like *Moi*, collapses the feminine to the female. When Cixous speaks of a feminine libidinal economy, Jones interprets this as signifying an innate female sexuality. Cixous reads Clarice Lispector as exemplifying libidinal economy, Jones interprets this as signifying an innate female sexuality:

[Cixous] celebrates the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector for what she sees as peculiarly *female* attentiveness to objects, the ability to perceive and represent them in a nurturing rather than dominating way. She believes that his empathetic attentiveness, and the literary modes to which it gives rise, arise from *libidinal* rather than *sociocultural* sources (my emphasis, 365).

Does Cixous read Clarice's *female* attentiveness to objects or is it Jones that misreads Cixous? Is Jones or Cixous the anatomical reductionist? Jones opposes a libidinal economy to the social construction of sexuality and reads libidinal economy as signifying an essential female sexuality but does Cixous do this? Should we read Cixous' feminine libidinal economy anatomically, through biology, that is to say literally as signifying innate female sexuality? Or should we resist the reduction, the collapse? Is it possible to read 'feminine' metaphorically? The same question can be asked of other French feminists. For example, Luce Irigaray's article "When Our Lips Speak Together" has been criticized along the same lines as Cixous' "white ink". Did Irigaray mean there is some essential link between women's anatomy and how they speak? Or was she simply using the metaphor of lips to signify a particular kind of writing?

That one cannot collapse feminine into female in Cixous' text is, at times, blatantly evident or else how is it possible that in *Readings with Clarice Lispector*, Martim, the male character in *Apple in the Dark* is more feminine than the female characters? Cixous writes, "Given the nature of his crime, one could think that Martim is a real man. In fact, everything is reversed. A close reading shows that he is the most feminine of all the characters" (69). In this passage the feminine is divorced from any relation to female and functions metaphorically, to signify particular characteristics that Martim has that the female characters do not. Cixous writes that "The generic term [i.e., male and female] is deceptive and the economies of giving, of exchange, of communication do not correspond to the apparent sex" (77). Since there is no necessary relationship of females to a feminine libidinal economy, we

need to explore the significance of a reading practice and conception of writing that is based on the notion of libidinal economies categorized by gender. This will help determine the relationship of female to feminine, a relationship, I argue, that is central to the essentialist quagmire.

Cixous reads Clarice Lispector to work on a feminine libidinal economy, she reads Clarice for the inscriptions of a different relation to the gift, to pleasure, to time, to the subject, and to writing. When asked in a 1982 interview with Verna Conley what she means by 'libidinal', Cixous responds that she uses it in a very precise Freudian manner. She defines it as "the movement of a pulsion toward an object" which allows us to know what in other times had been analyzed as the treaty of passions" (130). 'Libidinal' concerns psychic drives and the way one orients oneself towards the world, it inhabits the area traditionally understood as the realm of instincts. However dangerous it might be to talk about drives, instincts and passions, it is also important to speak about pleasure, about how women experience pleasure because, unlike Lacan, Cixous believes women have something to say about their pleasure. Clarice certainly does:

Aqua viva is the inscription of a certain kind of pleasure, of a pleasure that does not keep itself for itself. Generally, one holds back one's pleasure: I am having pleasure, but I do not say it. This brings us back to the Lacanian predicament: woman has pleasure but does not know that she has pleasure; she is incapable of saying it. Lacan keeps on saying that women have nothing to say about their pleasure. This is not true. Pleasure is all *Aqua viva* is talking about. (1990, 15)

Libidinal drives manifest themselves through specific economies. By 'economy' Cixous means "the effect of desire, of love" (1982, 130). *Aqua viva* inscribes pleasure but it is a certain kind of pleasure, a pleasure based on the economy of not keeping itself for itself, a pleasure not dependent on the proper, on property, on presence. Clarice experiences pleasures, passions and drives but the way she inscribes these pleasures depends on different economies, the effect of desire on giving, on exchange, on writing. Libidinal economy is not exclusively about sex, it is also about writing and reading. In reading for Clarice's libidinal economy, Cixous discusses issues of narrative, time and subjectivity. For example, the fragmentary nature of *Aqua viva* signals a

specific libidinal economy to Cixous. Writing in fragments means writing without a narrative: "Given her libidinal economy, Clarice does not like narrative and all it entails in literature" (1990, 14). The absence of a narrative signifies the non-linear nature of the text. Time is different in Clarice – beginnings and births emerge everywhere: "As there is no story, one can start anywhere"; "There are only beginnings, hundreds of them" (1990, 15,17). The libidinal economy of Clarice's texts is defined by its fragmentary nature, its use of repetition and weblike structure, its excessive character or limitlessness and its "positive lack". In order to distinguish between a libidinal economy that rejects narrative and one that inscribes linearity, for example, Cixous employs the qualifiers 'masculine' and 'feminine.' Excessiveness is on the side of femininity: "In Clarice, we have a magnificent logic, that of a feminine libidinal economy, of an overabundance, directed toward a question rarely pondered, but always a feminine question about the unexpected drama of pleasure as excess" (1990, 117). Excessiveness – that which cannot be contained, enclosed ("enfemme(r)"?), that which names without naming, that which is but is also always more – is feminine. Why? Certainly, women have traditionally been inscribed on the side of excess as the unrepresentable "dark continent" that exceeds understanding. But given this philosophical baggage, why use masculine and feminine and not white and black or positive and negative? Why use gender qualifiers when they only introduce an overwhelming history of orienting the world around what is for men and what is not? What do masculine and feminine libidinal economies have to do with males and females? Confusion and chaos are introduced, leading to Jones' reading of feminine libidinal economy as innate female sexuality.

Cixous is often asked in interviews to clarify the confusion, to speak about her use of feminine and its relation to women's bodies, a relationship that, as shown with Martim, is not one of simple identity. Conley writes, "For Cixous, the terms "masculine" and "feminine" do not refer to "man" and "woman" in an exclusive way" (9). In her interview with Conley, Cixous discusses the relation as a problem of language and history:

First of all, words like "masculine" and "feminine" that circulate everywhere and that are completely distorted by everyday usage, – words which refer, of course, to a classical vision of

sexual opposition between men and women – are our burden, that is what burdens us. As I often said, my work in fact aims at getting rid of words like “feminine” and “masculine,” “femininity” and “masculinity” even “man” and “woman,” which designate that which cannot be classified inside a signifier except by force and violence and which goes beyond it in any case. So it is true that when one says “feminine writing,” one could almost think in terms of graphology Instead of saying feminine writing or masculine writing, I ended up by saying writing said to be feminine or masculine, in order to mark the distance. In my seminar, rather than taking this elementary precaution, I speak of a decipherable libidinal femininity which can be read in a writing produced by a male or a female (1982, 129).

In her reading of texts Cixous deciphers two libidinal economies which need to be distinguished and the major ordering categories in Western thought are feminine and masculine. In employing the gender qualifiers, Cixous participates in history: “it is a question here of our whole history, or our whole culture, true, it would be nice if one could use, instead of masculine and feminine, color adjectives, for example” (1982, 130). But Cixous does not believe one can use such unproblematical adjectives, we live in history and sexual opposition is a defining characteristic of our historical and social position. She states that she does not use the terms masculine and feminine in her seminar but publicly, and for political reasons she does: “Publicly, I must constantly have recourse to them, because we are in history, we live in history, we are in a historical political situation which we must take into account We must take into account the fact that we are caught in a daily reality in the stories of men and women, in the stories of a role” (1982, 133). Femininity and masculinity, in this passage relate however tangentially, to men and women – question, of course, is what is the status of this relationship? How does “daily reality” overdetermine masculine and feminine? Is it a relation of metaphor? In “Sorties,” Cixous discusses the metaphorization of masculinity and femininity in history, the false attribution of qualities to men and women and the production of a whole sign system which aligns Woman with passivity, the moon, Nature, night, etc. (63). She writes:

The (political) economy of the masculine and the feminine is organized by different demands and constraints, which as they

become socialized and metaphorized, produce signs, relations of power, relationships of production and reproduction, a whole huge system of cultural inscription that is legible as masculine or feminine. (1986, 80)

By using feminine and masculine to qualify libidinal economy Cixous participates in their metaphorization which is to say that she is reading cultural inscriptions rather than anatomical bodies. Realizing that femininity can never be divorced from its signifying chain, Cixous does not mean it narrowly and literally to refer to biological females. But once Cixous has displaced the feminine from the female, what becomes of those bodies? If we displace the term from the literal referent, how does the metaphor function?

The presence of metaphor in philosophy is an issue current in the French intellectual scene. Derrida, in "White Mythologies" and Irigaray in *Speculum of the Other Woman* both discuss the philosophical concern with figurative language and the traditional desire to divorce truth from metaphor. Derrida argues that while philosophical discourse asserts a truth outside metaphor, and attempts to resist any contamination of figurative language, it cannot do so: philosophy can never escape the metaphysical concept of metaphor. The general economy of metaphor is an economy of usure, of loss, "it will never make a profit" because even if one sought to circumscribe all metaphors in philosophy, "one metaphor, at least, always would remain excluded, outside the system ... the metaphor of metaphor" (219-220). Irigaray showed a similar economy at work in Plato. While Plato argues against metaphor as a bad copy of the Ideal, the mode of his argument consists, itself, of metaphors, specifically the metaphor of the cave/womb/woman. For both Irigaray and Derrida, the issue is philosophy's relation to language and the impossibility of divorcing the figurative from the literal or truth from metaphor. In looking at the relation of feminine to female in Cixous as one of metaphor, I am wondering if Derrida's and Irigaray's argument does not work backwards? That is to say, can the literal be divorced from the figurative? Is it possible to empty out all meaning from feminine that relates to the referent of female bodies? Like the very way in which the metaphor of the cave contaminates Plato's argument against representation, does the referent of the female body, contaminate Cixous' metaphor?

In speaking about Clarice's feminine libidinal economy the meta-

phor of birth plays a central role for Cixous. She writes, "the question of birth is an intensification, a metaphorization of a situation that is read as painful. It is determining for her and recurs as one of the themes of her writing" (1990, 39). Diane Griffen Crowder reads Cixous' use of maternal metaphors as indicative of her slippage into biologism. Crowder states:

Despite occasional disclaimers, Cixous views motherhood as a primary trait of women, as we shall see. But is maternity a metaphor or a biological act for Cixous? A hesitation between metaphor and reality, the symbolic and the lived, permeates her writings Cixous' theory of "woman's writing" is based upon a vacillation between the body as concrete object and the body as a signifier in the social discourse of the unconscious. (132)

It becomes evident in reading a wide range of Cixous' work that there is a vacillation – anatomical bodies invade the space of metaphor. The movement from the maternal metaphor to literal maternity corresponds to the trope of dead metaphor in which the metaphoric rendering of the word turns into a literal expression. In a dead metaphor, the originary figurative use is forgotten and "leg of the table" is understood as a literal signification. In a 1986 interview Cixous speaks about the maternal metaphor in the following way:

I could write a thesis on the theme of giving birth in texts by women, it would be fascinating, It's a metaphor which comes easily to women, dictated by their experience. It's a metaphor Clarice Lispector uses, it's a metaphor I use. During childbirth a discovery is made inside the body. We can transpose the discovery, using it to understand moments in life which are analogous. A man will understand different things differently. Their bodies are sources of totally different images, transformations, expressions (1988, 151).

The metaphor deadens in Cixous when anatomical difference effects experience, for example, women's experience of childbirth or the way the two sexes make love. Women form analogies between experience biologically exclusive to them and a fictional theme, therefore, a feminine libidinal economy in this case (i.e., Clarice's birth thematic) is necessarily related to writing by biological females. That biological differences do effect the way a person writes is clear in the following

statement by Cixous: "I don't believe a man and woman are identical. Our differences have to do with the way we experience pleasure, with our bodily experiences, which are not the same. Our different experiences necessarily leave different marks, different memories ... And these are transmitted through the text" (1988, 150). Following from these statements, it seems impossible to interpret Cixous' reading of the feminine libidinal economy of Clarice's text, its use of birth metaphors, within the realm of active or live metaphor. The relationship of feminine to female in these passages is not simply figurative and metaphorical. But on the other hand, given what Cixous has said about the femininity of Martim, it is neither a purely literal relation in which biology overdetermines language.

Interestingly, in exploring the relation of literal to figurative in Cixous, of bodies to text, of feminine to female, I was led from the territory of metaphor into that of metonymy. Cixous comes back to metaphor and metonymy quite often in *Reading with Clarice Lispector* and what she says about them, how she figures them in her own text, is telling. In discussing Clarice's use of non-identical repetition, repetition with a difference, Cixous invokes metaphor:

I am still in metaphors; I do not fear them; I am obedient to what this text suggests. The text is metaphor itself, a metaphor that is not a metaphor but *aqua viva*, living water, an ongoing, gigantic metaphor, a facsimile of a book, which permanently works with a countermetaphor "with" (17).

The notion that something can be a metaphor and not a metaphor at the same time is repeated later by Cixous. In describing a feminine libidinal economy in terms of fluid, she writes, "the miracle of the fluid that Clarice gets across is neither metaphor nor nonmetaphor" (77). Fluid, living water is central to the metaphor which is not a metaphor. It seems to me that something that is along the lines of living water, that is ongoing, fluid, functioning with 'with,' is within the territory of metonymy. Perhaps in thinking about the relationship of feminine to female we need to think along the lines of a metaphor that is not a metaphor, that is closer to a metonymy.

The metonymic field is based on contiguity and combination rather than on identity and similarity. This difference allows us to escape the either/or established by traditional articulations of the essentialist problem – i.e., either one reads the relation of feminine to

female literally, therefore, biologically and anatomically, or one reads it metaphorically and thus having no relation to women. Anglo-American suspicion of the political ineffectiveness of French feminism is rooted in the latter formulation, that is to say, if the feminine is only a metaphor and Martim, Joyce or Genet can be better women than women, what could be the political usefulness of such a theory for the material conditions of women? To think of the relation as one of contiguity allows for the introduction of material considerations while avoiding essentialist definitions of women. When asked about why she returns to the use of feminine and masculine Cixous gives the following answers, in which the metonymic or contiguous relation is described:

That is why I come back to the question of the terms masculine and feminine Because in spite of everything and for historical reasons, the economy said to be feminine – which would be characterized by features, by traits, that are more adventurous, more on the side of spending, riskier, on the side of the body – is more livable in women than in men. Why? Because it is an economy which is socially dangerous in our times (1982, 133).

When I qualify this libidinal economy by masculine or feminine, I do it with ten thousand precautions, because the words I use are deceptive. They are easy to use; they are facile current words. We should do without them, but we still use them. A feminine economy does not refer to women, but perhaps to a trait that comes back to women more often (1990, 156).

Feminine does not mean female but that is not to say there is no relation at all – it is a metaphor and also not a metaphor, a metonymy. Certain traits, certain characteristics are displayed by women, actual females, more often than men, and if you went along a continuous field you would find female arising more often than male. Feminine is not identical but contiguous with female. In criticizing Cixous' use of the maternal metaphor, Domna Stanton posits metonymy as a way of conceptualizing the maternal that avoids the identity and sameness implied by metaphor. While I disagree with Stanton's interpretation of the function of the maternal metaphor in Cixous, her suggestions regarding metonymy are useful. She describes metonymy as the trope that depends on history and, as such, must be understood materially.

Metonymy, to Stanton, is “the trope that cannot be defined,” which means that the combinatory chain relating the two terms to each other must be determined within a specific historical and social context. Thus, the contiguity established between feminine and female is not essentialist, rather, it is historically specific. The problem I have with Stanton’s reading of Cixous stems from the opposition she creates between her positive metonymic understanding of the maternal and what she sees as Cixous’ negative and transcendental metaphoric rendering. The opposition between metaphor and metonymy, in this case, results in Stanton’s dismissal of any meaningful insight possible from Cixous and it is an opposition that I do not think Cixous’ texts establish.

In defining the metaphor that is not a metaphor as a metonymy, the traditional opposition of metaphor and metonymy is displaced. Thus, it must be noted that when I say the relation of femininity to female is one of metonymy, I do not mean to oppose it completely to metaphor. This is what traditional scholarship on metaphor and metonymy does. The conventional, binary dualism of the two tropes is informed by Roman Jakobson’s groundbreaking work on aphasics in which he describes metaphor and metonymy as polar opposites, the former relating to the faculty of substitution and selection and the latter relating to contiguity and combination. Jacques Lacan upholds the polar opposition of metaphor and metonymy in “The agency of the letter, in the unconscious or reason since Freud.” Lacan reworks Jakobson’s distinction, inscribing it in psychoanalytic terms – the field of metaphor corresponds to the Freudian concept of condensation and metonymy is identified with displacement.

In saying the relation of feminine to female is one of metonymy, I am not opposing it to metaphor, rather, I believe Cixous subsumes the two, insofar as the metaphor that is not a metaphor is a metonymy. The project of thinking non-oppositionally informs Cixous’ work on sexual difference. Realizing that the language of presence is the only language present, she avails herself of masculine and feminine:

Because we are born into language, and I cannot do otherwise than to find myself before words, we cannot get rid of them, they are there. We could change them, we could put signs in their place, but they would become just as closed, just as immobile

and petrifying as the words 'masculine' and 'feminine' and would lay down the law to us. So there is nothing to be done, except to shake them like apple trees, all the time (1988, 15).

Cixous constantly shakes the apple trees. She dreams of the day when we no longer need to use the terms masculine and feminine or man and woman, when those terms no longer carry any significance. This will only happen when the logic of Hegelian difference is no longer posited, when we think difference differentially, non-oppositionally – “No longer would the common logic of difference be organized with the opposition that remains dominant. Difference would be a bunch of new differences” (1986, 83). Part of the project of thinking difference differently is functioning in the feminine libidinal economy that Cixous reads in Kleist, Joyce or Wordsworth. In not collapsing the feminine into female Cixous explores a theory of bisexuality that undermines stable sex oppositions.

Traditional, patriarchal, conceptions of sexual difference presuppose a stable, concrete difference between men and women. Cixous' theory of bisexuality inscribes a difference that is not a difference between men and women but difference within them: “All human beings are originally bisexual” (1982, 131). Cixous' conception of bisexuality is not one in which difference is erased, neutralized by positing a subject constituted by two halves, two sexes making one, single whole. Rather, she articulates an “other bisexuality,” “that is to say the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes, evident and insistent in different ways according to the individual, the nonexclusion of difference or of a sex” (1986, 85). Thus, different drives, different libidinal economies are present in both sexes. She does not deny that these economies are overdetermined by social and cultural signifying systems which produce different relations of historical, sexed subjects to libidinal economies but, by positing bisexuality, Cixous is able to open up the possibility of an elsewhere in which sexual difference will no longer exist in its present form (“It is impossible to predict what will become of sexual difference in another time (in two or three hundred years” ?”) (1986, 83). In such a future, when males and females explore the infinite possibilities of their bisexuality, in this world of elsewhere, 'woman' will no longer hold us captive, and the either/or of essentialism will be worn out.

Notes

1. In the American context it is easy to distinguish 'female' from 'feminine' in terms of sex and gender, the former denoting anatomy and the latter determined by social constructions. The question within the French context concerns 'woman'. Simone de Beauvoir defined 'woman' as a social construction, whereas, I think, Anglo-Americans are more likely to read 'woman' in terms of biological sex. My essay is really about this confusion (a confusion introduced through translation for the triad of female, feminine and woman is not active in French in the same way that it is in English) and thus when I use 'woman' I mean both and neither senses at the same time.
2. I am using "Anglo-American" here to signify a group of theorists who have come to stand for a particular anti-essentialist argument, although I realize that the whole of Anglo-American feminism is in no way represented.

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