



## Machiavelli's Sisters: Women and "The Conversation" of Political Theory

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## MACHIAVELLI'S SISTERS

### Women and "the Conversation" of Political Theory

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If one is a woman, one is often surprised by a sudden splitting of consciousness, say in walking down Whitehall, when from being the natural inheritor of that civilization, she becomes, on the contrary, outside of it, alien and critical.

— Virginia Woolf<sup>1</sup>

**P**OLITICAL THEORY, IT IS OFTEN SAID, is a conversation—a trans-historical dialogue that links the voices of the present with those of the past in a discourse concerning the meaning of public life. The seductive promise of a common inheritance which transcends the contingency of individual existence and extends an invitation to join in a shared symbolic language is celebrated in Machiavelli's famous letter to Vettori, dated December 10, 1513:

In the evening, I return to my house, and go into my study. At the door I take off the clothes I have worn all day, mud spotted and dirty, and put on regal and courtly garments. Thus appropriately clothed, I enter into the ancient courts of ancient men, where, being lovingly received, I feed on that food which alone is mine, and which I was born for. For four hours I feel no boredom and forget every worry. I do not fear poverty, and death does not terrify me. I give myself completely over to the ancients. I have written down the profit I have gained from their conversation, and composed a little book *De Principatibus*.<sup>2</sup>

For Machiavelli, to enter the conversation is to leave behind the mud-spotted world of daily life and to seek reprieve, nourishment, and immortality

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in the dream of a common language. To find his place in this conversation, the theorist takes temporary leave of his own “house” and, on the threshold to that otherworldly realm of his “study,” strips off the dirty clothes of his everyday existence and dons the “regal” mantle of what we now call political theory. It is only then, “appropriately clothed,” that he can nurture himself, and, by the same token, his creative project, *De Principatibus*. That project, although rooted in the historical context of sixteenth-century Italian society and politics, is conceived (“I give myself completely over to the ancients”) and then gestates in the intellectual company of those ancient men before it can be delivered to the world in the form of a “gift” to Lorenzo de Medici.

Participation in the conversation, then, produces a gift: It is the gift of the theorist to his society, the gift of theory to politics. It is the gift, perhaps, with which Machiavelli hopes to raise himself, once again, to the public, historical stage of Florentine politics. But before the theorist surrenders the gift of his “little book,” and thereby of himself, to the world outside his study, he has had to fashion his self as a political thinker — a self which, while shaped by his earlier diplomatic missions, was wrought largely in exile in his quasi-mystical experience of a more timeless form of gift-giving: the fraternal exchange of words occasioned by his daily journey into “the ancient courts of ancient men.”

Indeed, within the discursive space of the study, the courteous and mutual exchange of words, as gifts, obtains a fraternal community of unique and symbolic dimensions. For the “gift” as a form of counterrepresentation, argued Marcel Mauss in his celebrated *Essai sur le don* (1925), induces an elaborate web of social relations known as the symbolic order. When understood in George Bataille’s rewriting of Mauss, the experience of gift giving as expenditure or *dépense* is one in which the self gives fully, completely: “mystical states which effect a momentary dissolution of self-awareness to the point of simulating death.”<sup>3</sup> In Machiavelli’s words, that condition is only possible in the masquerade of the “study”: “I feel no boredom and forget every worry. I do not fear poverty, and death does not terrify me.” Thus it is here in the symbolic world of the study, feeding on the conversation of men, that Machiavelli can forget his origins in the house, his maternal debt, and give birth to himself, to that other immortal part of himself — the political theorist.

But in suggesting, as Norman O. Brown writes, that “the fraternity is the mother,”<sup>4</sup> that the “journey of initiation” ends in the fraternal exchange of gifts in a study in which men replace by becoming their own mothers, I have introduced all too quickly a trope (the gift of theory) which must, and will be, elaborated carefully. To situate my reading of the Machiavellian moment

of political discourse on more familiar terrain, then, let us reconsider this famous passage from a different angle.

Instead of speculating on the conscious and unconscious meanings that those "courts" might have had for the historical Machiavelli, we might read his self-representation less as a clue to the enigmatic character of his "experience" and more as an invitation to think through his academic positioning as a trope, as a cherished fraternal figure whose transposition to the more regal realms of the study has become synonymous with what Sheldon Wolin, citing the example of Machiavelli, has called the "perennial dialogue" of political theory.<sup>5</sup> **The exchange of words with the fathers and the weight of the past shape as well the contemporary theorist's image of what it means to enter and to learn about the conversation.** Much like his sixteenth-century ancestor, today's "historically minded theorist," writes Wolin, "is engaged in the task of political *initiation*."<sup>6</sup> Respecting the traditional "boundaries" of political discourse, this reverential sage introduces "new generations" to those same texts that gave his predecessors "the sense of travelling in a familiar world where the landscape has already been explored."<sup>7</sup> It is a discursive world whose "common" and "symbolic language . . . enables one user to understand what another is saying," just as it compels each speaker to constrain himself within the limits of an existing "political vocabulary."<sup>8</sup> What the vivid example of Machiavelli teaches us, argues Wolin, is to respect the historical terms of discourse: **"Of all the restraints upon the political philosopher's freedom to speculate, none has been so powerful as the tradition of political philosophy itself. In the act of philosophizing the theorist enters into a debate the terms of which have largely been set beforehand."**

**But what if the political theorist is a woman?**

In posing such a question, this essay invites political theorists to reconsider the fraternal rite of passage ("initiation"), that is, Wolin's rewriting (and the commonly accepted understanding) of the great Machiavellian metaphor of the conversation, from the position of the woman who speaks but who refuses to forget or deny her material origins and activities in the house; a woman who interprets that derided domestic space not as a debilitating, "mud-spotted" condition of immanence but as "pregnant" with political meaning; **a woman who experiences not a comforting sense of the "familiar" when she traverses the Wolinian political "landscape" but Woolf's "splitting of consciousness," which stands as a powerful reminder that she is no member of the club, rather a criminal whose very presence is transgressive.** If this female conversant does not despair of, but plays with, her status as an alien speaker, it is because she has no desire to adopt the priestly stance of her fathers nor to engage in the fraternal rites of passage that secure their

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cultural authority. Yet she knows that when she dresses *consciously* like a man, she dons the regal robes of political theory not to shore up but to disrupt the terms of the fraternal masquerade. **In this essay, then, I ask political theorists to consider what it means to intervene in the conversation as a feminist.**

political  
theorist -  
feminist

### CROSS-DRESSING

To explore the different strategies that feminists use when they enter the conversation, I would like to begin with **the important exchange between Mary Dietz and Jean Elshtain on the politics of maternal thinking.**<sup>10</sup> At stake in the debate, as we shall see, is the significantly different interpretation that the authors give to the feminist slogan “the personal is political” — a fundamental proposition which, as Teresa de Lauretis writes, “urges the displacement of all . . . oppositional terms, the crossing and recharting of the space between them.”<sup>11</sup>

In addressing themselves to a community of political theorists (Dietz to the readers of *Political Theory* and Elshtain to readers of the short-lived journal *Democracy*), the authors (much like the author of this article) must negotiate the very terms of discourse which Wolin argued to be constitutive of the “speculative horizon” of political theory. Those terms organize the discussion around the maternal, affective values of the family and the private sphere, on one hand, and the civic, impersonal relations of a political community, on the other. Although both theorists want to rethink the relations of public and private spheres, I argue, they are ultimately faced with making a choice between the two, a choice which compromises their efforts to rethink the relationship of the house to the study. At the risk of oversimplifying their positions, I will focus on Elshtain’s and Dietz’s very different readings of Sophocles’ *Antigone*. My discussion will introduce, if only briefly, a third interpretation of this text — that of Luce Irigaray — in an effort to complicate the political conversation.

The contrasting ways in which Dietz and Elshtain understand the “personal is political” is suggested by their very different approaches to Sophocles’ text. The tragic figure of Antigone, Elshtain argues,<sup>12</sup> embodies the conflict of private and public understood as feminine (caring) versus masculine (instrumentalist) values of community. Antigone, she contends, takes up the position of women and articulates a maternal discourse, rooted in the values and practices of the family, to contest the arrogance and violence of the state, represented by Creon. For Dietz, however, the drama might be

read as "illustrative of two opposing political viewpoints: One is of Creon, who represents the state and centralized power, and the other is of Antigone, who represents the customs and traditions of a collective civil life."<sup>13</sup> Whereas Elshtain would revalue the derided language of *doxa*,<sup>14</sup> the ancient word for "mere opinion," Dietz insists that the language of the household and of mothers cannot be extended into but must be itself transformed by public discourse if it is to be politically meaningful. For Dietz, then, Antigone is first and foremost a "citizen." She "transcends the private/public split because she embodies the personal made political." Through her speech and her action, she transforms a matter of private concern into a public issue.<sup>15</sup>

But, we might ask, are not the languages of Antigone and Creon more tragic, more mutually exclusive than either Elshtain's or Dietz's reading of them would suggest?

The work of Sophocles, writes Irigaray, "marks the historical bridge between matriarchy and patriarchy."<sup>16</sup> The visible bond of blood that "a matriarchal type of lineage ensures" is giving way to "the privilege of the proper name,"<sup>17</sup> to a family and a state organized around the invisible: the legal fiction of paternity. But, in Sophoclean tragedy, "the power of the father's name" has not yet triumphed; on the contrary, "had its right already been in force," the name-of-the-father would have "prevented Oedipus from committing murder and incest."<sup>18</sup> Likewise, if "Antigone does not yet yield to the law of the city, of its sovereign, of the man of the family," says Irigaray, it is because "another law is still drawing her along its path: identification with her mother."<sup>19</sup> However, the mother — to whom Antigone's actions speak but whom her words can never reach in Creon's city — is not that domesticated figure represented by the patriarchal "*maternal ideal*,"<sup>20</sup> it is the "woman-mother (*femme-mere*)"<sup>21</sup> whose ancient murder Antigone refuses to forget: a repressed matricide which haunts the terms of discourse in Creon's patrilineal and patriarchal vision of the state. Antigone's discourse is not only criminal but suicidal in a political city which recognizes only the masculine voice and, what Irigaray calls, its logic of the "self-same."<sup>22</sup> The tragic nature of her speech, then, derives from its allegiance to the maternal relations of blood rather than to the paternal fiction of a name. Because they do not recognize the same law — Antigone acknowledges only that of the mother, Creon appeals to that of the father — they do not share a common language: "between her and the king, nothing can be said."<sup>23</sup> As Josette Feral comments, Antigone articulates the unspoken in speech, her maternal debt, by living and dying a virgin: She denies "the woman that she is in the name of the mother which she will never be."<sup>24</sup>

Following Irigaray, then, to reclaim Antigone, as Elshtain does, as “guardian of the prerogatives of the *oikos*, preserver of familial duty and honor, defender of children,”<sup>25</sup> overlooks the fact that Antigone’s crime takes her far from that social world in which “human life is nurtured and protected from day to day.” Likewise, to interpret her, as Dietz does, as a citizen who stands for an alternative “political ethos”<sup>26</sup> neglects the doubled figure of the tomb/womb to which she is condemned and to which she condemns herself. Antigone, writes Irigaray, defies all “the inventions of men,” patriarchal family *and* state, “by/in her relationship to Hades.”<sup>27</sup> In contrast to Elshtain’s maternal heroine, Irigaray’s daughter of Jocasta does not revalue but “refuses her condition as a woman,” and she pays for this transgression with her life. And in contrast to Dietz’s public citizen, Antigone stands not for a “collective civil life,” in which “citizens are not intimately but politically involved with each other”;<sup>28</sup> she refuses *any* discourse which resolves “all (blood) ties between individuals into abstract universality.”<sup>29</sup>

If Elshtain and Dietz translate, finally, the foreign, dissonant voice of Antigone into the more familiar, reassuring voice of mothers and/or citizens, it is because their readings have been “framed,” so to speak, by the larger political conversation: a “perennial dialogue” which requires that the authors articulate feminist politics by situating themselves in relation to the accepted terms of debate (public/private), and by defending a particular reading of canonical texts.<sup>30</sup> As a specific feminist strategy, however, this taking of sides in the conversation may be necessary for those traditionally excluded voices of women who, to use Michael Oakeshott’s phrase, seek to “gain a proper hearing.”

Oakeshott’s image of the conversation as a “meeting-place of various modes of imagining”<sup>31</sup> suggests as it begs the problems involved for women who would enter the dialogue. When one voice controls or monopolizes the terms of discourse, Oakeshott rightly warns, the terms of speaking not only make it “difficult for another voice to be heard, but it will also make it seem proper that it should not be heard.”<sup>32</sup> The danger is that “an excluded voice may take wing against the wind, but it will do so at the risk of turning the conversation into a dispute. Or it may gain a hearing by imitating the voices of the monopolists; but it will be a hearing for only a counterfeit utterance.”<sup>33</sup>

However appealing his image, Oakeshott’s playful metaphor of speaking – when it is invoked as it has been by scholars to describe the nature of political conversation – both obscures the historical conditions that have shaped the “perennial dialogue” and invites a critical reappraisal of an academic community that gives women a hearing only when they conform

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their words—as I now am conforming mine—to the historically accepted terms of the debate. But by accusing Dietz and Elshtain of not transforming those terms I too risk participating in the scholarly sleight of hand which allows political theorists to pretend to listen but which silences, finally, the more radical tones of feminist discourse. My critical reading of the debate risks overlooking the ambiguities and subtle transformations which feminists effect whenever they enter alien territory. As Mitzie Myers has written, “subordinate groups like women must shape their world views through . . . received frameworks” since “if women’s alternative or counterpart models are not acceptably encoded in the prevailing male idiom, female concerns will not receive a proper hearing.”<sup>34</sup> For Oakeshott, we have seen, this imitation of the “dominant voices” amounts to a “counterfeit utterance.” Myers, however, who is attentive to political questions of sexual difference and language, understands the problem of counterfeiting oneself somewhat differently: “Since female models characteristically operate in terms of strategically redefining and rescripting traditional markers, the linguistic surface of such sexual pronouncements” (as the “maternal” or the “female” citizen) “must be carefully scrutinized for imperfect integrations, submerged conflicts, covert messages—for all the meanings which hover interstitially.”<sup>35</sup>

To remain attentive to Myers’s sensitive formulation of the difficulties involved for women who must insert themselves within accepted idioms if they are to be heard is to raise the problem of conversation in what Mikhail Bakhtin calls “dialogic” terms.<sup>36</sup> I will return to the dialogic character of language, that is, its orientation towards another, in the conclusion to this essay. Here, I want only to point out that Bakhtin’s understanding of how the language of any locutor anticipates the response of its addressee invites us to pay more attention to the act not only of speaking but of listening, and how feminist political discourse, as Bakhtin writes of rhetorical discourse, may try “to outwit possible retorts to itself”<sup>37</sup> by clothing itself in traditional garb, by masking its meanings in acceptable idioms: those of the study. But the question remains as to whether wrapping oneself in the classic texts can, in fact, enable feminists to pose the questions that they need to ask when they insist that the personal is political.

I find the feminist uses of masks—for instance, Elshtain’s and Irigaray’s very different elaborations of Antigone’s maternal discourse or Dietz’s articulation of her public discourse—helpful when they point to the ambiguities of any text. When feminists inhabit traditional texts to make them speak their silences or to disrupt conventional interpretations, their masquerade becomes politically significant in its challenge to the cultural authority of political theory. Yet I hesitate when this critical if playful approach to classic



texts becomes a feminist project of reclamation. When, in wearing the mask of the political theory fathers to articulate feminist politics, the feminist masquerade works to prop up the historical conversation, feminists may become complicit in the very process by which a “tradition of discourse” recuperates their insights to shore up its own boundaries. Moreover, the limits of the canonical economy for thinking through critical political questions of gender become evident when the voices of feminists become submerged in those of the theorists who are invoked, consciously or not, to give women the cultural authority to speak. The moment in which *inhabiting* the masculine voice of a text gives way to *hiding* behind that voice is not always evident; remaining aware of the danger, however, is important for those critics who deploy the classic texts to disrupt their modes of enunciation and address, in which man is the sole term of reference. However important are their texts, the political theory fathers simply cannot pose the same order of questions — of the politics of sexual difference — which have been generated by the feminist movement.

My point is not to deny the importance of feminist rereadings nor is it to suggest that feminists can free themselves from the oppressive categories of the conversation simply by refusing to read canonical texts. As Christine Froula has written, for feminists to refuse the Great Books neglects the fact that “we have been reading the patriarchal ‘archetext’ all our lives.”<sup>38</sup> What is needed, she argues, are feminist critical strategies that question and reimagine “the structures of authority for a world in which authority need no longer be ‘male’ and coercive nor silence ‘female’ and subversive, in which, in other words, speech and silence are no longer tied to an archetypal — and arbitrary — hierarchy of gender.”<sup>39</sup>

In what follows I want to examine a related yet alternative feminist rhetorical strategy for intervening in a conversation which is organized around the arbitrary significations of gender: mimicry. Mimesis, we shall see, can be an effective strategy for disrupting a modern conversation which now admits women as conversants but whose unspoken symbolic terms require that, when women speak, they continue to disguise themselves as men and deny their origins in the house. For the mimic takes seriously the unstated conditions of her speech: the masquerade of femininity.

### MIMICRY

Irigaray’s claim that Creon and Antigone have nothing to say to each other points to even more complex — and disturbing — problems of language than

those suggested by the preceding discussion of the difficulties feminists face when speaking to a community of political theorists. In her criminal rewriting of Lacanian notions of a phallogocentric symbolic order, Irigaray elaborates the mutually exclusive character of feminine and masculine discourse and goes so far as to argue that women cannot enter a conversation, any conversation, without counterfeiting themselves because **women and men do not stand in an equal relationship to language**. As we shall see, following Irigaray's account of language, the problems involved for women who would enter the political conversation lie not in the latter's historically androcentric exclusivity nor in its specificity as a particular tradition of discourse (as *political* discourse) but, instead, in the universal symbolic rules of discourse itself. To unpack the complexity of women's alien status in the symbolic contract, however, we must look first to Lacan's rewriting of Freud as it elaborates the complex relationships between the Name-of-the-Father and femininity.

Lacan takes up Freud's 1920 observations of the *Fort//Da!* game played by his grandson to illustrate how language is used to recreate "the presence and absence of persons and things."<sup>40</sup> The word is but "a presence made of absence"; with words, "absence itself gives itself a name."<sup>41</sup> In entering the symbolic order, as Terry Eagleton glosses Lacan, "the child unconsciously learns that a sign has meaning only by dint of its difference from other signs, and learns also that a sign presupposes the *absence* of the object it signifies."<sup>42</sup> Lacan links the "symbolic function" to the paternal prohibition ("the name of the father"),<sup>43</sup> that is, to the *place* of the father as the disruptive third term in the mother-child relation. Thus the child's efforts at symbolization take place in the context—not only of the comings and goings of things, of persons, and, specifically, of the biological mother—but within a symbolic order whose paternal law prohibits the incestuous, undifferentiated relations of mother and child.<sup>44</sup> Lacan emphasizes the centrality of the father and, specifically, the castration complex in the constitution of the speaking subject because only paternal law can break the preoedipal imaginary dyad.<sup>45</sup> As Ann Rosalind Jones has written, "Lacan calls language *le Nom du Pere* (the no/name of the father) to emphasize the father's double role in the acculturation of the child: he prohibits the exclusive pre-verbal mother/child bond and he takes center stage in the child's fantasy, as the representative of language and society."<sup>46</sup>

The castration narrative, observes Dominick LaCapra, also tells the story of fetishism: "It begins with a non-event, a disavowal of perception, a refusal to see what is there."<sup>47</sup> The fetish "is itself the narcissistically invested surrogate for the phantasmatic lost totality" (the maternal phallus)—"a

totality that never existed and whose imaginary constitution requires a conversion of absence into loss on the basis of a nonperception."<sup>48</sup> And "to castrate woman," as Irigaray mockingly writes of the Freudian/Lacanian narrative, "is to inscribe her in the law of the *same* desire, of *the desire for the same*."<sup>49</sup> **Woman is but a mirror for the male ego; she is the "foundation for this specular duplication, giving man back 'his' image and repeating it as the 'same.'**"<sup>50</sup> **"The girl thus enters into the castration complex in the same way as the boy, like a boy. She 'comes out' of it feminized by a decision, which she is duty bound to ratify, that there cannot be a nothing to be seen."**<sup>51</sup> If, in Lacan's words, "*la femme n'existe pas*,"<sup>52</sup> it is because her symbolization is impossible in a system of representation which refuses to recognize female sexual difference and which converts it, instead, into a *rien a voir*—the absence of a phallus.<sup>53</sup>

Yet if a woman can enter the symbolic order only if she conforms herself to the masquerade of femininity, Irigaray suggests, so too can she mock the male voice that erases her own efforts at self-representation by *deliberately assuming the position of the mimic*. Although that position is assigned to women in a patriarchal libidinal economy of what Irigaray calls "hom(m)osexualite," **the male desire for the same, mimesis can be deployed by the female speaker "to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse."**<sup>54</sup> Mimicry enacts a defamiliarized version of femininity; it is a rhetorical strategy that aims to convert female subordination into an affirmation of the "feminine" through a parodic mode of speaking/writing. The mimic searches out the unspoken in discourse in her effort to reveal theoretical speculation as "specul(ar)ization": theory as a fetish for the phallus (Freud), and both as fetishes for the missing woman (Irigaray)—for the "femme-mere" whose ancient murder is covered over by "representational epistemologies that privilege evidence derived from the (male) gaze."<sup>55</sup>

**"Political philosophy,"** writes Wolin, **"constitutes a form of 'seeing',"**<sup>56</sup> and it is from his own particular "angle" (p. 23) of vision that the theorist may broaden but never destroy the "speculative horizon" that bounds those who would participate in the perennial dialogue. However, the creative dimension of the theorist's language, he suggests, issues in part from the power of his "vision" (p. 18), of his "imagination" (p. 19), in short, of the gaze with which he would "render political phenomena intellectually manageable" by seeing and presenting them in "what we can call a 'corrected fullness'" (p. 19). "The gaze," writes Irigaray, "is at stake from the outset. Don't forget, in fact, what 'castration,' or the knowledge of castration, owes to the gaze."<sup>57</sup> "The idea that a 'nothing to be seen,' a something not yet subject to the rule of visibility, of specula(r)ization, might yet have some

reality, would indeed be intolerable to men."<sup>58</sup> The theoretical activities of male philosophers must push all that exceeds and threatens this reflexive circularity into an "omitted background,"<sup>59</sup> the "unthought" of political discourse.

"By an act of thought the theorist seeks to reassemble the whole political world. He aims to grasp present structures and relationships and to re-present them in a new way";<sup>60</sup> he seeks to "transcend history" (p. 19), to "fashion political cosmos out of political chaos" (p. 8), writes Wolin. Yet such activity, comments LaCapra, raises "an obvious question . . . [as to] the extent to which the ideal of providing comprehensive accounts or global theories that 'bring order to chaos' entails phantasmatic investments."<sup>61</sup> And so the theorist must theorize (theory — from the Greek *theoria*, from *theoros*, "spectator," from *thea*, a "viewing").<sup>62</sup> Situated within the existing "speculative horizon" of the conversation (speculate — from *specere*, to see, look, from *specula*, a lookout, watchtower)<sup>63</sup> the theorist as seer casts out a "net" of inherited "concepts and categories" from his tower in the study, a "particular net," says Wolin, which "bring(s) into play a principle of *speculative* exclusiveness whereby some political concepts are advanced for consideration and others are allowed to *languish*" (p. 21). Turning presence into absence, he remains thereby the potent master of his insight; he is not blinded by what he might see; he circumscribes his field of vision. Yet, like the fetish, the phantasmatic, his theory also turns absence into presence; he "epitomizes a society by abstracting certain phenomena and providing interconnections where none can be seen. Imagination is the theorist's means for understanding a world he can never know in an intimate way" (p. 19).

If participation in the "perennial dialogue" produces the "gift" of theory, if it gives the theorist "the sense of travelling in a familiar world where the landscape has already been explored," then Irigaray suggests that this symbolic landscape (and its gifts) is familiar insofar as each traveller has left at the threshold to the political conversation the mud-spotted clothes of his material beginnings in the original home of the mother, the maternal gift, and donned the robes woven from the father's language: "So every enunciation, every affirmation, will develop and certify the recovery of the obliteration of the immutable connection of the being to the material mother."<sup>64</sup> When conceptualized as a kind of *Bildungsreise*,<sup>65</sup> then, in which the theorist as speaking subject — like the boy of Lacan's castration narrative — crosses the metaphorical threshold by renouncing his desire for the mother (*noli tangere matrem*),<sup>66</sup> the rite of passage ("initiation") into the "legitimate heritage" of the study translates the "private" relations of sexuality and the home into a

nonobject, a “nothing to be seen” that can have no status in the political conversation except that of disorder.<sup>67</sup>

Just as the figure of the absent mother asks us to rethink the relationship of the house to the discursive world of the study, so does Irigaray’s trope of “hom(m)osexualite” ask us to consider the etymology of the word “conversation,” which derives from the Latin *conversatio*, meaning “intercourse” — “social” or “sexual.” While the latter signification is now used only in the legal phrase “criminal conversation” (i.e., adultery as grounds for divorce), Irigaray’s post-Lacanian critique of language raises the question of whether a woman can enter political theory qua conversation qua language as anything but a criminal — as an adulteress, as a *homme manqué*, or as any other expression of the male desire for the same. From her perspective, for a woman to enter the symbolic order is to become caught within the “specular logic” of patriarchal discourse, to watch herself transfigured from the “little girl who is (only) a little man” (Freud) into the mother who is only a “maternal ideal.” For if men exchange the gift of words in the study, woman, Freud tells us, patiently awaits the “gift” of a child in the house, the “seed” man gives her to compensate for her childish “penis envy.”<sup>68</sup>

In the view of Irigaray, then, Oakeshott’s ideal metaphor of the conversation as a nonhierarchical medley of voices must, for women, remain an impossibility, for, as language, the dialogue is always already monopolized by the masculine voice. Women can participate in the conversation only if they accept their fraudulent status as speaking subjects; they cannot join in the existing exchange of words as gifts because, as Lévi-Strauss and Carole Pateman have shown us,<sup>69</sup> it is women who are the most precious objects of exchange. Consequently, for women, mimicry is not the condition of speaking when the conversation breaks down; it is the only mode of speaking available to a woman within the phallogocentric rules of the conversation itself.<sup>70</sup>

Irigaray’s deliberate use of mimesis, then, is directed not at gaining a place for women in existing discourses, in the conversation, but at “jamming the theoretical machinery” of patriarchal systems of representation which are “excessively univocal.”<sup>71</sup> Her alternative conception of woman’s “style” of speaking (*parler femme*)<sup>72</sup> would “put the torch to fetish words, proper terms, well-constructed forms.” Implicitly refuting such “oculocentric” metaphors for writing as Wolin’s “vision,”

this style does not privilege sight; instead it takes each figure back to its source, which is among other things *tactile*. It comes back in touch with itself in that origin without ever constituting in it, constituting itself in it, as some sort of unity.<sup>73</sup>

Only then, she argues, will a language be possible which does not define the feminine “as lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject”;<sup>74</sup> and only then, her work suggests, will the relations of the house not be left to “languish” in political discourse nor the relation to the maternal body be expressed as the uncanny disorder of women.

Irigaray rightly draws our attention to the fact that, as Monique Plaza writes, “it is not a genuine difference of the sexes which regulates the patriarchal system.” Her work, then, is important for political theorists because it asks them to reconsider what relations have been consigned to that “omitted background,” which they cannot (or refuse to) see from their tower in the study, and is important for feminist political theorists because it invites us to consider what is at stake for feminists in refusing the “meta-language” of Western discourse.<sup>75</sup>

But, we might ask of Irigaray, would the feminist critique of political discourse be identical with that of her critique of language *tout court*? Is language, in fact, the monolithic totality that she (and Lacan) make it out to be? If, as Plaza insists, “women are not the object, ‘woman,’ of the masculine discourse,”<sup>76</sup> then is women’s status in language as alien and must her discourse be as different, as Irigaray suggests? Finally, does not *political* discourse offer alternative modes of speaking for feminists who are neither content to play the mimic nor eager to establish “true differences” between the sexes?

In what follows, I turn to another view of how individuals enter a dialogue which suggests that it is precisely because the sheer arrogance of any statement can be revealed by the interlocutor as ridiculous that language offers the possibility of a genuine exchange of competing ideas: J.G.A. Pocock’s model of the “language polity.” In contrast to Irigaray, Pocock insists that parody enables a far more democratic form of conversation. Intimating that women need not be condemned to repeating Echo’s gesture, Pocock’s speech act theory of language holds that all oppressed speakers can “play . . . (their) way out of the role which language assigns” them.<sup>77</sup> But to play Pocock’s language games, a woman may have to consent to more than the masquerade of sameness, of sexual indifference.

#### (VERBAL) RAPE

“There is something unilateral about the act of communication,” writes Pocock, “which does not take place between consenting adults. By speaking words in your hearing, . . . I impose on you information that you cannot

ignore.” This “act of *verbal rape*—this penetration of your consciousness without your consent,” is “my” attempt “to determine what your response will be.” However, if “we have shared a medium of communication consisting in a structure of shared conventions, you have more of the freedom that comes of the prior *consent* to the form that my acts took” (emphasis added).<sup>78</sup> What makes language such a forceful yet plastic medium for political communication is the fact that no speaker can assume the status of “Humpty Dumpty” (pp. 33-34). For “institutionalized language-structures” make meaning “relatively uncontrollable and hard to monopolize” (p. 35).

On Pocock’s speech act theory of the “language polity,” to be assigned the position of the other in the context of another’s linguistic performance, to have one’s subjectivity denied and violated by another’s words, need not condemn one to the immutable and oppressive status of the Absolute Other for an authoritative subject who speaks. The multiple possibilities that inhere in the very nature of language as communication, argues Pocock, insure that the same utterances that define the other of any speech act as the Other for the speaker can be turned on the latter himself: They can be invoked to contest the speaker’s authority. Pocock’s understanding of the ambiguities that make possible such acts of interpretation, however, is fundamentally different from that of Lacan and Irigaray. For Pocock finds ambiguity not in the instability of the (masculine) speaking subject but in the “frictions” that emerge between the “intentions” of the speaker and the social context of his “performance.” In Pocock’s view, ambiguity is the discrepancy that emerges between the (conscious) meaning intended and the meaning produced in the “two-way” structure of communication.<sup>79</sup>

Pocock wants to “slow down the power act” (p. 36)<sup>80</sup> in politics by diffusing the clash of conflicting interests through the play of ambiguities in political discourse. He would contain potentially radical politics and differences of meaning within what J. L. Austin calls “the total speech act in the total speech situation.”<sup>81</sup> But the stress on intentions in speech act theory, as Jacques Derrida has argued,<sup>82</sup> conceals what Eagleton calls the “unhealthily juridical” preoccupations of speech act theorists to control “who is allowed to say what to whom in what conditions.”<sup>83</sup> As Christopher Norris notes, Derrida does not deny that there is an intentional aspect to language, but he refuses the claim of those, like Austin, that “philosophy can lay down the rules of this procedure by explaining how language *should* or *must* work if its workings are to make good sense.”<sup>84</sup>

However, if speech act theory would lay down such laws by excluding the effects of the “structural unconscious” of any text,<sup>85</sup> the poststructuralist account of language suggests that the very dependence of political discourse

on the figural resources of language opens up a somewhat different set of concerns. As Derrida has demonstrated in his reading of Austin, the most revealing passages of an argument may be those metaphors that appear at first glance to be peripheral to the “real” meaning of any spoken or written statement. Thus it is often in the margins or the footnotes that a text reveals the contradictions which challenge its claim to enduring truth.

On closer examination, then, Pocock’s startling metaphor of rape, as the act that initiates human conversation, may reveal some unintended, unconscious meanings. Speech as verbal rape suggests that there lurks in Pocock’s “language polity” that unquestioned category of sex which enables the author to speak of “the utterance” in the language of sexual violation. But the provocative metaphor that Pocock chooses to talk about the “real” meaning of ambiguity in language could be turned on the speaker/author himself. As the Red Queen said to Alice: “When you’ve said a thing, that fixes it and you must take the consequences.” As Pocock translates this fable for his readers: “We can interpret her as meaning that to use language you must make commitments” (p. 34). From a slightly different angle, the Queen’s words suggest that when you use language to describe a thing — in Pocock’s writing, the thing called language — you have not only “performed upon yourself” but on others; “you are inescapably perceived as having performed in ways defined by others’ acceptances of the words you have used” (p. 34).

So-called “female” readers of Pocock’s performance may ask him to take responsibility for the commitment that is his utterance. Of course this “penetration of [our] consciousness without [our] consent” may be Pocock’s self-proclaimed “attempt to determine what [our] response will be”; but it may also have unintended consequences. Pocock would contain the ambiguity of meanings, of those consequences, in the meta-theoretical claim that speaking subjects must first “consent” to their violation, to specific symbolic structures, if they are to contest the act of “verbal rape.” But must we accept those “shared conventions” that presumably give us the right to dispute the violence of the author’s linguistic performance? What happens to the conversation if we question fundamental conventions, such as “men” and “women,” that make verbal rape much more than a figure of speech?

“The English language contains no third-person pronoun without gender,” writes Pocock in what amounts to an apologetic footnote. “In writing of the authors *in* the history of political discourse, most of whom were men, I am unembarrassed to find myself using the masculine pronoun.” However, he qualifies, “when it comes to the authors *of* that history, a host of distinguished names occurs to remind me that it might just as well have been the feminine.”<sup>86</sup> For some curious reason, this reader of Pocock’s utterance is re-



minded of Freud's remarks that the *scholarly* discussion of femininity has been made possible by the work of "several of our excellent women colleagues." However, those colleagues who had accused the male analysts of being unable "to overcome certain deeply rooted prejudices against what was feminine" lost their critical authority when it came to scholars like Freud: "We . . . standing on the ground of bisexuality . . . had only to say: 'This does not apply to you. You're the exception; on this point you're more masculine than feminine'."<sup>87</sup>

Now some of us "women" who would pursue (what Pocock citing Oakeshott calls) "the intimations of a tradition of behavior" (p. 43) might contest the claim that "most" of the speakers "*in* the history of political discourse" were men (Whose history? Who are the exceptions?). If Pocock's riddle is "Why *weren't* there more women in the history of political discourse?", the feminist question is "Why don't we *know* more about them?" At least part of the answer can be found in the political "conversation" as an academic fiction. Further, we women scholars who are graciously included as "authors of that history" might also refuse the claim that we are "more masculine than feminine." We might wonder if we can, in fact, occupy positions in language, such as the masculine third-person pronoun, without erasing ourselves as subjects. We might worry about the hidden implications of a pluralist political conversation that repeats our absence as ancient members of the club while affirming our scholarly contributions and our right as scholars to read and to comment on the privileged texts — that is, of course, if we agree to accept Pocock's "shared conventions" or Wolin's "tradition of discourse." For what, one might ask, does it mean for the modern "female" conversant to affirm her status as a speaking subject by claiming the masculine position in a conversation? What can it mean for a woman who is a political theorist to participate in the political conversation by inserting herself as neuter in a dialogue that has been described as a rape?

To articulate a theory of the "language polity" that fails to take account of sexual difference in its enunciation and address repeats the infamous apology of Lévi-Strauss to his feminist critics that women are not only signs but sign producers.<sup>88</sup> This *indifference* to issues of gender, speech, and power elides the kind of critical questions that might be posed about metaphors, like verbal rape, and about the "equal access" of men and women to institutionalized structures of a language that "has no third person pronoun without gender." In contrast to Pocock, feminists have not been content to apologize for oppressive linguistic traditions but have asked what the latter can tell us about language as a political means of communication.

*THE CONVERSATION AND CULTURAL AUTHORITY*

“In the midst of an abstract discussion,” wrote Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, “it is vexing to hear a man say: ‘You think thus and so because you are a woman.’” However, she added,

I know that my only defense is to reply: “I think thus and so because it is true,” thereby removing my subjective self from the argument. It would be out of the question to reply: “And you think the contrary because you are a man,” for it is understood that being a man is no peculiarity.<sup>89</sup>

Beauvoir’s “defense,” in this passage, articulates the paradoxical relationship in which feminists stand to discourse: being and not being a “woman.” If the woman who would speak is effectively silenced by being shut up in her femininity, the defensive claim to “truth” merely repeats the effacement of self by affirming the masculine claim to the universal.<sup>90</sup>

However, contends Monique Wittig, Beauvoir’s efforts to avoid sliding into the masculine shifter by affirming “I am a woman,”<sup>91</sup> no matter how ambiguously stated, grants the condition of both “being” and “not being” a “woman” on androcentric terms. For the “woman” that qualifies the “I” in such a statement must dissolve the claim of the speaker to her subjectivity. “Language as whole gives everybody the same power of becoming an absolute subject,”<sup>92</sup> writes Wittig. “But gender, as an element of language, works upon this ontological fact to annul it as far as women are concerned and corresponds to a constant attempt to strip them of . . . their subjectivity.”<sup>93</sup> From Wittig’s position, then, women must question the “what goes without saying”: the “shared conventions” of language (Pocock) which assume as ontological the socially and discursively constructed categories of “men” and “women.”<sup>94</sup> For in the context of a conversation, Wittig would argue, those conventions do not give to women “the freedom that comes of the prior consent to the form” that another’s verbal act takes. Grounded as they are in the exchange of women and heterosexist notions of the subject, such conventions result in verbal and physical rape.<sup>95</sup>

If Wittig’s own strategy for contesting oppressive symbolic structures of language seems to be an unnecessarily negative one (i.e., a refusal to repeat the terms woman/women), Bakhtin’s dialogic theory of language suggests at least one reason why these words—as well as those of “public” and “private”—pose such difficulties for feminists. “The word in language is half someone else’s,” writes Bakhtin; it does not “exist in a neutral and impersonal language . . . but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s

contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own." Yet "not all words for just anyone submit easily to this appropriation . . . many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them."<sup>96</sup>

Following Bakhtin, then, one could argue that the problem of the conversation for feminists who must use historically oppressive words which resist a more critical transfiguration of their meaning (man/woman, public/private) is far more complex than Pocock's "language polity" makes it out to be and far more politically contingent than psychoanalytic approaches to language suggest. Because language "is populated — overpopulated — with the intentions of others,"<sup>97</sup> no word is neutral and all words bear the traces of meanings given to them by others who use words to conceptualize "specific world views, each characterized by its own meanings and values."<sup>98</sup>

Yet if words, at times, "stubbornly resist" the critical appropriation of those who would challenge the social relations words represent and re-present as necessary, even natural, so too does the dialogic nature of language resist the "centripetal" (unifying) forces of such "unity in diversity" notions as Wolin's "tradition of discourse." For "the centripetal forces of the life of language, embodied in a 'unitary language,'" writes Bakhtin, "operate in the midst of heteroglossia."<sup>99</sup> The latter, which refers to the "centrifugal, stratifying forces" of language, is possible because there is no language (as Lacan would have it) but only languages and that at any given moment in history, the dream of a common, univocal, unitary, or official language is being challenged by the so-called "low-genres," be they Bakhtin's examples of the everyday and theatrical speech of street fairs, of clowns, and of irreverent literary forms (satire)<sup>100</sup> or contemporary feminist discourses and challenges to the canon. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (following the insights of Bakhtin) have written: "Discursive space is never completely independent of social place and the formation of new kinds of speech can be traced through the emergence of new public sites of discourse and the transformation of old ones."<sup>101</sup> And feminism, as a political movement, is engaged in precisely that kind of transformation of discursive space, of what counts as public discourse.

Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, of "speech diversity," invites political theorists to affirm that "all languages" — including that of their cherished conversation — are "masks" and that "no language . . . [can] claim to be an authentic, incontestable face."<sup>102</sup> But in contrast to pluralistic dreams of "the conversation" — which actually work to contain conflict within an agreed on (by whom?) field of meaning — Bakhtin's dialogic theory insists that because language, as languages, is always "ideologically saturated" and the site of

political struggle, those speakers who wear the mask of common sense, of reason, of a "tradition of discourse" oftentimes elide responsibility for their own meanings, their own interests. Posing as reverential sages, they pretend to defend the virtue of political theory, the integrity of the conversation, but what they are, in fact, doing when they police meaning is defending their own cultural authority for which they refuse to make themselves accountable.<sup>103</sup> The mask of tradition as conversation, then, is but a subterfuge, an artifice invented by an academic interpretive community to evade the kinds of questions that feminists pose when they state that the personal is political.

Feminists err, however, when they seek recognition in the official language of any academic community; instead, they might play out the dissonant and affirmative possibilities which inhere in the alien role assigned them in the univocal fantasy. Feminists cannot *reclaim* but must transform a political conversation that inscribes their absence as women and as speaking subjects. However, if feminism's site(s) of discourse is not the study, neither is it the house, for feminists refuse the "public/private" distinction which the Machiavellian metaphor of conversation both assumes and constructs as the condition of speaking for masculine subjects. And when feminists refuse to wear any one mask (mother or citizen) or to search for a core self behind the mask (female or male), and when they refuse to speak any one discourse (that of the "maternal" or that of "the tradition"), their voices will effect such transformation.<sup>104</sup>

If political theorists wonder why they should listen to these voices, Bakhtin suggests at least one answer. In contrast to the "authoritative discourse" that Wolin's "historically minded theorist" has *made* of the study, feminist discourse, when it refuses to adopt a priestly stance, offers the possibility of what Bakhtin calls an "internally persuasive discourse": "When someone else's ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us and acknowledged by us, entirely different possibilities open up."<sup>105</sup> Unlike the "authoritative word," writes Bakhtin, the "internally persuasive word" is not "static;" its "unfinishedness and the inexhaustibility of our further dialogic interaction with it" make this word political.

In conclusion, then, we might say that when feminists open the door to the study, the conversation might, at times, sound the same, but it cannot be the same. Indeed, the feminist masquerade *may* create a scene of subversive dimensions. And she who knows that the "tradition of discourse" is but one mask, one mode of speaking, occupies neither the bisexual terrain of scholarship granted by Freud nor the sexually indifferent and presumably equal position of speaking in the "language polity" of Pocock; instead, the theatrical presentation of self in traditional costume questions the very naturalness

of the male self that makes an exclusive claim to political language. Within its “fantastical encasements,” to borrow Terry Castle’s phrase,<sup>106</sup> this self is a fiction whose “authenticity” may turn out to be nothing but a disguise that protects its fragile identity; that is, when what was taken to be a regal, natural privilege is mocked by a simple question: “Halt! Who goes there?”<sup>107</sup>

### NOTES

1. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1929), 169.
2. Quoted in Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Political Thought* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), 22-23. See also, Niccolò Machiavelli, “Letter to Vettori,” December 10, 1513; *The Prince and Other Works*, edited by Allan H. Gilbert (New York: Hendricks, 1941), 242.
3. The quotation is from Michèle Richman, “Sex and Signs: The Language of French Feminist Criticism,” *Language and Style* 13 (Fall 1980): 62-80, at 63. See also, Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, edited by Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), esp. “The Notion of Expenditure,” 116-29.
4. Norman O. Brown, *Love’s Body* (New York: Random House, 1965), 34.
5. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 22.
6. Sheldon Wolin, “Political Theory as a Vocation,” *American Political Science Review* 63, no. 4 (December 1969): 1062-82, at 1077. I am indebted to Joe Romance for pointing out Wolin’s use of a confessional word, “initiation,” to describe the “vocation” of political theorists. This gender-laden metaphor, I will argue, suggests more than the distinction that Wolin explicitly draws between the conceptually rich approaches of political theorists and the historically impoverished methodologies of political scientists.
7. *Ibid.*, 23.
8. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 23.
9. *Ibid.*, 22.
10. I examine the following essays: Mary Dietz, “Citizenship with a Feminist Face: The Problem with Maternal Thinking,” *Political Theory* 13 (February 1985): 19-37; and Jean Bethke Elshtain, “Antigone’s Daughters,” *Democracy* 2 (1982): 46-59. Although Elshtain’s article, “Reflections on War and Political Discourse: Realism, Just War, and Feminism in a Nuclear Age,” appeared with Dietz’s in the same issue of *Political Theory*, I have chosen to focus on Elshtain’s 1982 essay, largely because Dietz’s essay takes the latter as a departure point for her critique of maternal thinking.
11. Teresa De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 56.
12. Jean Bethke Elshtain, “Antigone’s Daughters,” *Democracy* 2 (1982): 46-59.
13. Dietz, “Citizenship with a Feminist Face,” 29-30.
14. Jean Bethke Elshtain, “Feminist Discourse and Its Discontents: Language, Power, and Meaning,” in *Feminist Theory*, edited by M. Rosaldo and B. Gelpi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 130.
15. Dietz, “Citizenship with a Feminist Face,” 28-29.

16. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, translated by Gillian G. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 217.

17. *Ibid.*, 216, 217.

18. *Ibid.*, 217.

19. *Ibid.*, 218, 219.

20. Freud's patriarchal elaboration of the "superego" that "results from the sham death of desire for the mother," writes Irigaray, replaces "a mother" with the "idea of the mother," with the "maternal ideal": "Better to transform the real 'natural' mother into an ideal of the maternal function which no one can ever take away from you" (*Speculum*, 81).

21. Irigaray refers here to that murder which Freud forgets in his *Totem and Taboo*: a murder, as Margarete Homans writes in *Bearing the Word* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), which "is necessary to civilization." In Irigaray's view, Homans continues, "this more ancient murder is represented by the myth of the murder of Clytemnestra by her son in revenge for the murder of Agamemnon" (p. 2). See Irigaray, *Le Corps-a-corps avec la mere* (Ottawa: Pleine Lune, 1981), 15-16. Christine Froula makes a similar point in her essay "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (December 1983): 321-47, 337. But the murdered mother might also be Antigone's own mother and Oedipus's mother-wife: Jocasta. For on learning of her crime, Jocasta hanged herself, and Oedipus put out his eyes and left Thebes with his daughter Antigone.

22. *Ibid.*, 220. See the following section for a discussion of the "self-same."

23. Irigaray, *Speculum*, 218. On the same point, see Irigaray, "Questions," in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, translated by Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 155.

24. Irigaray's reading here is interpreted by Josette Feral, "Antigone or the Irony of the Tribe," translated by Alice Jardine and Tom Gora, *Diacritics* 8 (Fall 1978): 2-14, at 2.

25. Elshtan, "Antigone's Daughters," 55.

26. Dietz, "Citizenship with a Feminist Face," 29.

27. Irigaray, *Speculum*, 218.

28. Dietz, "Citizenship with a Feminist Face," 31.

29. Irigaray, *Speculum*, 220.

30. For example, in her otherwise compelling and powerful critique of maternal thinking, Dietz finds herself in the curious position of defending the political theory fathers against social feminists like Elshtan: Aristotle, who was "without question, wrong to restrict women to the household," but whose view "forms no necessary part of his argument concerning politics and citizenship," and Sophocles, who, "despite his views on women's silence, [is] such a visionary tragedian." "Citizenship with a Feminist Face," 29.

31. Michael Oakeshott, *The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind* (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1959), 11.

32. *Ibid.*, 15.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Mitze Myers, "Reform or Ruin: 'A Revolution in Female Manners,'" *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 11 (1982): 199-216, at 202.

35. *Ibid.*

36. "The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes and answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue," writes Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 280.

37. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 353.
38. Christine Froula, "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (December 1983): 321-47, at 343.
39. *Ibid.*
40. The child, who when it throws and retrieves a cotton reel and utters, respectively, *Fort!* then *Da!* (there/here), writes Lacan, plays and replays "the presence and absence of persons and things." Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," (1920) *Standard Edition*, 18:14-17; Jacques Lacan, "Function and Field of Speech and Language," *Écrits*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 65, 109 n. 46.
41. Lacan, "Function and Field," 65.
42. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 166.
43. *Ibid.*, 67.
44. *Ibid.* As Jacqueline Rose writes in "Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the *ecole freudienne*," *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London and New York: Verso, 1986), "Lacan's position should be read against two alternative emphases: on the actual behavior of the mother alone (adequacy or inadequacy) and on the literally present or absent father (his idealisation and/or deficiency)" (p. 63). Lacan writes that he will introduce the expression "paternal metaphor" to "make the link between the Name of the Father, in so far as he can at times be missing, and the father whose effective presence is not always necessary for him not to be missing" (quoted in Rose, "Feminine Sexuality," 62).
45. The "phallus forbids the child the satisfaction of his or her own desire, which is the desire to be the exclusive desire of the mother" (Lacan quoted in Rose, "Feminine Sexuality," 61).
46. Ann Rosalind Jones, "Julia Kristeva on Femininity: The Limits of a Semiotic Politics," *Feminist Review* 18 (Winter 1984): 56-73, at 57. See also Jacques Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus," *Écrits*, 281-91.
47. "For 'in the beginning' the vagina is foreclosed—a derealized reality. It is replaced by another reality which is 'perceived' as absent—something one 'knows' should be there: the penis," writes Dominick LaCapra, "History and Psychoanalysis," in *The Trial(s) of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Françoise Meltzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 9-39, at 28.
48. *Ibid.*, 29.
49. Irigaray, *Speculum*, 55. Psychoanalytic notions, like castration, says Irigaray, are part of male universalism: "Since the recognition of a 'specific' female sexuality would challenge the monopoly on value held by the masculine sex alone, in the final analysis by the father, what meaning could the Oedipus complex have in a symbolic system other than patriarchy?" Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse," 68-85, at 73.
50. Irigaray, *Speculum*, 54.
51. *Ibid.*, 50.
52. "Woman" here refers to "The Woman": "There is no such thing as *The woman*, where the definite article stands for the universal." "The woman can only be written with the *The* crossed out." Jacques Lacan, "God and the Jouissance of The Woman," *Feminine Sexuality*, edited by Jacqueline Rose and Juliet Mitchell (New York: Macmillan, 1982), 142.
53. Woman's "nothing to be seen" is a nothing "that might cause the ultimate destruction, the splintering, the break in their systems of "presence," of "re-presentation" and "representation"; a hole in men's signifying economy" that threatens "the process of meaning, dominated by the phallus—that *master signifier*." Irigaray, *Speculum*, 50.
54. Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse," 68-85, at 76.
55. Mary E. Hawkesworth, "Feminist Rhetoric: Discourses on the Male Monopoly of Thought," *Political Theory* 16 (August 1988): 444-67, at 450.

56. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 17. Page references will be cited in the text.
57. Irigaray, *Speculum*, 47.
58. *Ibid.*, 50.
59. The phrase, which is Whitehead's, reads as follows: "Each mode of consideration is a sort of searchlight elucidating some of the facts and retreating the remainder into an omitted background" (quoted in Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 22).
60. Sheldon Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," 1078.
61. LaCapra, "History and Psychoanalysis," 29.
62. This is taken from Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 58.
63. I am indebted to Pat Moloney for pointing me to the *Oxford English Dictionary* on the meanings of "speculate."
64. Irigaray quoted in Monique Plaza, "'Phallogomorphic Power' and the Psychology of 'Woman,'" *Ideology and Consciousness* 4 (Fall 1978): 5-36, at 11.
65. See LaCapra, "History and Psychoanalysis," 28.
66. Irigaray, *Speculum*, 210.
67. Be it Rousseau's "disorder of women" or Machiavelli's *Fortuna*.
68. Irigaray, *Speculum*, 74-75.
69. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, translated by Bell, Sturmes, and Needham (Boston: Beacon, 1969); Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988). For Irigaray's discussion of the exchange of women, see "Women on the Market" and "Commodities among Themselves," both in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 170-91, 192-97, respectively.
70. Hence Irigaray insists on the need for developing alternative modes of speaking such as *parler femme*: modes which seek to subvert structures in which women like words are nothing more than tokens to be exchanged.
71. Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse," 78.
72. *Parler femme* is Irigaray's alternative mode of speaking which, however, cannot be defined. Woman's sexual pleasure, she contends, is multiple, plural, and so is her style: "She is indefinitely in herself." Her language, in which "she sets off in all directions," leaves " 'him' to discern the coherence of any meaning." *Parler femme* connects with mimicry in that both subvert logic, reason, and the code with which men would order the heterogeneous social world and the heterogeneity of female *jouissance* (see *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 28-31, 78-79). Needless to say, both strategies are highly controversial and the subject of intense debate within feminism.
73. Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse," 79.
74. *Ibid.*, 78.
75. Irigaray, "Questions," 144.
76. Plaza, "'Phallogomorphic Power,'" 25. Irigaray's alternative mode of speaking, Plaza accuses, retains the oppressive notion of a sexual division which depends on the very naturalistic criteria she condemned in her critique of Western culture's idea of Woman. "It is as abusive to define a woman by a man as to postulate her radical difference from him" (p. 26).
77. J.G.A. Pocock, "Verbalizing a Political Act: Towards a Politics of Speech," *Political Theory* 1 (February 1973): 27-45, at 42. Further page references to this essay will be cited in the text.
78. J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 19.
79. Pocock notes that our language is not our own, that "each of us speaks with many voices, like a tribal shaman in whom ancestor ghosts are all talking at once" ("Verbalizing," 31).



However, this is about as close as he comes to any suggestion that there might be unconscious forces at work when we speak.

80. "I prefer my politics verbalized," he writes—quite simply because "an act of power verbalized . . . is an act of power mediated and mitigated" (p. 34).

81. Quoted in Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 119.

82. See Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," *Glyph*, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 172-97; John R. Searle, "Reiterating the Differences," *Glyph*, vol. 1, 198-208; and Derrida's response to Searle, "Limited Inc. abc," *Glyph*, vol. 2 (1977), 162-254.

83. *Ibid.*, 119.

84. Christopher Norris, *Derrida* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987). Derrida writes: "What is limited by iterability is not intentionality but the character of being conscious or present to itself" ("Limited Inc.," 249, quoted in Norris, 179). In emphasizing the recoverable nature of intentions, moreover, speech act theorists also conceal the relations of power in interpretive communities which authorize the speech of some and deauthorize that of others.

85. It excludes the effects of that unconscious by stressing the possibility of recovering (if incompletely) the intentions of a speaker/author, and by emphasizing the need to "get his meaning right" (Derrida, "Limited Inc.," 213). See, for example, Pocock's quarrel with psychoanalytic readings of Edmund Burke's *Reflections in Virtue, Commerce, and History*.

86. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 7.

87. Sigmund Freud, "Femininity," *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, 103.

88. Quoted in Michèle Richman, "Sex and Signs: The Language of French Criticism," 63-64. But this response, argues Richman, assumes that when women speak, they emit the very same signs as men.

89. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, translated by H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1952), xviii.

90. For Beauvoir, however, the solution to this dilemma is not *parler femme* quite simply because there can be no unambiguous voicing of the "female self," of the heretofore unrepresented "feminine" position in language, because there can be no gendered self that does not split, once again, the "female" subject who speaks into self and Other.

91. *Ibid.*, xvii.

92. Monique Wittig, "The Mark of Gender," *Feminist Issues* 5 (Fall 1985): 3-12, at 6.

93. *Ibid.*, 6.

94. Implicitly refuting the critique of Ingaray, Wittig's theory of language is one which refuses to identify the category of the subject with the masculine. For women, however, to make a claim to subjectivity through language requires that they negotiate the particular and the universal in a far more radical way than that suggested by Beauvoir: They must use language in ways that "universalize the point of view of a group condemned to being a particular."

95. For the symbolic structures that reproduce "sex" as a "fetish," as a "mythic formation," are connected to the social structures that perpetuate the sexual domination of women. See Monique Wittig, "The Trojan Horse," *Feminist Issues* 4 (Fall 1984): 45-49.

96. Bakhtin continues, "They cannot be assimilated into his context and fall out of it; it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker" ("Discourse in the Novel," 294).

97. *Ibid.*, 294.

98. *Ibid.*, 292.

99. *Ibid.*, 271.

100. *Ibid.*, esp. 272-73.

101. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 80.

102. *Ibid.*, 273. On the uses of language as masks, see Harold Alderman, *Nietzsche's Gift* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977).

103. Alderman makes a similar point about the subtext which allows for the creative response of the reader. Without this, we have only "the book in itself" myth which is perpetuated through the exegesis so derided by Nietzsche. This myth is "a mask which absolves the reader from taking full and explicit responsibility for his exegesis" (*Nietzsche's Gift*, 12).

104. On this point, see Helene Keyssar, *Feminist Theatre* (New York: Grove, 1985). The "emphasis on transformations enriches and clarifies the feminist slogan 'the personal is political'. Drama that pivots on recognition scenes, where the goal is to stand still and 'know thyself' is essentially conservative" (p. xiv).

105. *Ibid.*, 345.

106. Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), 4.

107. The phrase is Nietzsche's in his *The Use and Abuse of History*, translated by Adrian Collins (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1979), 30.

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