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On Feminine Sexuality(1)

The genital difference between men and women in their subjective image of reunified post coital power

MEN: Male orgasm in coitus implies man's narcissistic reunification with the image of his body, his reconciliation with his intercoital impotence, in other words, reconciliation with the flaccid sex organ appended to his phallic body. The man may not love his partner with his heart, the woman is for him an imaginary, materialized phallic, partial object of which he has taken possession during coitus. By possessing her sthenically in the phallic body and penetrating her with his erect penis (tooth, prong, member for both his static and his dynamic image, outpouring for his functional image), he recovers his totality, fills the lack signaled to him by the tension of his desire, and is satisfied with himself.

If the woman provides her partner with perceptible evidence that she has experienced or simulated pleasure during coitus, besides the narcissistic reunification with his body the man also experiences the sensation of an interpersonal accord vis-à-vis pleasure, which is consequently symbolic of a third term: he has made the woman experience pleasure. He has remade her as a woman. He is proud of himself.

It can happen that a man is jealous of the pleasure experienced by his partner, pleasure which he is not certain she gets from him physically, but from the repetition of an experience acquired elsewhere and awoken in her only by repetition. Thus, the attraction of certain men for insignificant women who would be non-existent without them (Pygmalion), or virgins who cannot compare them to other men, and who sometimes once deflowered-above all if it had been the difficulty of doing so which excited them-become nothing more than broken objects to be rejected, representing a castration which these men continue to negate, even while they incite it (Don Juan). This would also explain the attraction these men feel for women who are frigid-or must claim to be so-with all men, an attraction which makes them desperately seek, as they say among themselves, a pleasure which promises them a phallic plus-value.

This preference for the third term, the pleasure which the man, instead of providing the woman, takes for himself alone, pleads the case for a symbolic castration of passive anal pleasure not resolved during childhood, or of an image of the body originating in the active, anal phase, which has never been abandoned. It is probable that, at the time the conflicting Oedipal genital forces were structured, the emotional encounter with the father in a seductive scene as rival for the mother caused the boy to fantasize a primitive scene experienced as the refusal to accept the value of women and of the vagina. He is a ridiculous if equally dangerous and triumphant rival when the woman gives birth to a child, flesh of her flesh, which gratifies her and which she nourishes with a pleasure which a man will never know. For such small boys who experience difficulty in mourning the diminished attention of their mother, because they have to share her cares with younger siblings, it is not only their penis, incapable of giving birth to a child, but their anal-rectal outlet, in competition with the mother, which exercises passive attractive power on their father. For these former small boys, extra-conjugal intercourse with women during their adult genital life must then, by gratifying their anal power bound to non-fecund pleasure, compensate for their narcissistic wound, that is the fact of having provided children to their legitimate wives, because these children are rivals for her love for him.

When those men, marked by the mortifying anxiety of anal castration (manifest in the obsessive neurotic and the homosexual), have learned that children come from the womb of women, as a result of the contribution of the male seed, and that children never emerge from the bodies of men, they desire women (frigid or not-for if they are not already frigid, they will become so with them) who function for them as fetishes of the fecund hole (rectal or vaginal, their confusion on this point is considerable). And they hold fast to these women-fetishes, even to the point of marrying them, in order to have rights over them and their children, but never, however, to be happy with them or to render them happy. They also like to marry divorced women with children, in order to assume the part of the legitimate father, above all with male children, and thus to alienate these children, thanks to their influence over them, from their legal father. In other cases, this type of man will "make" a child with a woman in order legally to abduct him and consign him to his own line for maternal or paternal care, thereby healing the narcissistic wound in which resides his homosexual fixation on the father, whom he never succeeded in seducing, or the oral, anal or urethral fixation on the mother.

This summarizes all that is subjective in a man's desire for a woman, which contributes to making the coital encounter narcissistically valid for him-independently of any interpersonal, emotional dynamic-and which determines that for him, physically successful coitus, regardless of the pleasure or consequences for the woman, is a phallic confirmation which renders him narcissistic. One could even go so far as to say that any penetration by the penis of a (male, female or animal) body, in whatever orifice, is the basis for the fact that any eroticized boy-by projecting himself onto the body of any other, playing at the same time the role of man and of woman, active and passive-can experience the feeling of triumph upon successful coitus. He feels comfortable in his skin after the act, oblivious to any feeling on the part of the other, oblivious to whether or not the other has also experienced pleasure. All this sheds light on male subjectivity as being bound only to sthenic erection, penetration and discharge. It is a masturbation of sorts by means of an interposed object, which always provides the man with a feeling of well-being. We will thus better understand what constitutes the originality of feminine subjectivity.

WOMAN: In order that desire appear in the woman's genital zone, in accordance with the functional necessities of the penis-that is, that she can be penetrated-it is necessary that the woman's parents welcomed enough the birth of a female child, and that the oral phase of her childhood, including weaning, was passed satisfactorily. If in that phase she remained negative or demanding of the partial phallic maternal object (the breast), she could, during coitus, through the oral investment of the vagina, inflict on the man a mutilation of the penis. It is also necessary that her vagina had been actualized during the mourning for the magical, anal child which she believed babies to be for women, so as to ward off the danger of rape, which she risks owing to her investment in the vagina which, like an anus, would be inhabited by a centrifugal, phallic dynamic in relationship to the partial object. Thus, the woman's desire must be indifferent towards her vagina, whether she has not invested it either actively or passively, whether she is simply unaware of her vagina, or whether it is the seat of an appeal for a centripetal penis, valid insofar as it is more powerful than the destructive options which she may feel inhabit her.

However, her orbicular vulva-vaginal opening can also be invested passively by an anal libido, in which case she will experience neither desire nor repulsion. She will simply let herself be possessed by the man. In this case, the woman can subjectively make of her person, and of her sexual organ-which subjectively is an anal-rectal organ available to a seemingly fecal, partial object-a unified, phallic image. But then it is necessary that she will have invested her phallic person with narcissism, in order to compete with seductive women and attract from a distance the man, which provides her with the pleasure of having triumphed over her rivals. In fact, these are women to whom men, as sexual beings, are necessary, but exclusively in order to confirm their narcissism. Their exterior aspect is often more akin to a female masquerade than to femininity.

Coitus therefore requires neither a truly established Oedipus complex, nor-even less so-its resolution, but merely the acceptance, from the pre-genital phase, of a suspension of satisfaction and a shift onto the partner of her dependence on the mother or the father, a dependence which can be accompanied by a strong affective ambivalence. The fantasies of oral sadism, focused on the sexual organ of the partner, are not necessarily experienced by her as conflicting-except during pregnancy, since its fruit is a representation of man's phallic

and sexual activity, when the woman can experience a sense of guilt bound to a dependence on the mother, a submission which prevented her from entering the Oedipal conflict. That fact could perhaps somehow explain vomiting during pregnancy.

If the masochistic or anal-sadistic components related to that pre-Oedipal period prevail, the inter-coital periods are for her characterized by stomach aches. Pregnancies are painful, or particularly demanding cares or prerogatives deemed necessary for her due to her "interesting"(2) condition, and childbirth-but not coitus-is painful, of the morbid defecating type, rupture, centrifugal rape. Some childbirths are psychopathological-I exclude deliveries which are anatomically impossible for the woman-due to anxieties caused by the fact that the mother of the pregnant woman used the birth of her daughter, during her childhood, as an occasion to describe it as an ordeal. And in her introjected memories the daughter, like her mother who actualized herself through describing the suffering experienced during labor, in the process of becoming a mother herself, will inevitably attempt to outdo her mother with her own catastrophic suffering in labor-a suffering which has no anatomical basis.

The woman who has not resolved the Oedipal phase which would render her genital, in order to become attractive to men, must invest her body with oral and anal libido. She must make herself attractive and appetizing if she is to measure up on the marketplace of women. And when she observes herself in the mirror, which is her best friend, she wants to please herself, and thus identifies in her scopoc drives with the man who would be pleased by the image of herself as woman. The fact that something of this phase remains in all women is doubtless due to the long-standing, impotent rivalry with the mother, ready to be reawakened when confronted with women interested in men who look at them. This investment is apparent in the care women take with their bodies and clothes, while it is for the most part exceptional in men, except during adolescence, when their social fighting spirit, their audacity vis-a-vis girls, their erectile penetrating power, in short their self-confidence, are not yet assured. However, that phase passes quickly and, subsequently, it will be their wives, their tailors and their barbers, who take them to task as regards their appearance.

For proof of this, we need to simply visit first a barber shop and then a hairdresser's salon. It is rare to see a man do anything else than read his newspaper while the barber goes about his task. For women, the situation is quite different: every move of the hairdresser must be first studied and discussed in depth. The same is true as regards trying on clothes at the tailor's. Men usually want the thing done quickly. If the tailor is content, so much the better! If he is not, so much the worse for him! As for the woman, we know how it usually goes-unless, vindicating masculinity, she has negated her femininity and assumed a masculine bearing and dress.

A woman, whose desire is not centered on the man she loves or whom she wishes to attract, will feel a widow before she is even married. She was already the widow of her father, and the sterile vessel of their incestuous child, as she was previously the widow of her mother and, in her fantasies of the primary castration, perhaps penis-mutilated by her with the approval of the husband. We understand that what remains of her phallic body (her standing up), and that which has emerged with puberty (her breasts), are objects which she must care for. Until a man is bound by his desire to her, she experiences emotions in her sexual organ confirmed by no other sign than menstrual blood, proof of her barren opening, concealed behind the provocative swaying of her hips, the swelling of her breasts, her graceful line. By her emphatic elegance or the provocative mystery communicated by the flow of her clothing, her receptive womb signals itself. Her face, whose erogenous openings she adorns, her enticing glances, her pretended flights after she has apparently hit the mark on a male prey are all points in her favor marking her way in society before she discovers love.

Certain women may be jealous of all those women who before them attracted their man's desire or his attention, because they want an exclusivity of his person, his sexual organ, his social standing, his anal power, his admiration, his fecundity-in short, everything that is for them of phallic value. It is probably for this reason that they judge selfish even men who are not.

When the woman's desire is still vulva-vaginal, it is linked to the (narcissistic) oral and anal libido, for which reason it is unconsciously castrating and mutilating of the penis, abducting its spermatic pleasure in order to be ornamented with the child fetish promised as a first-class commodity, to be admired, petted and devoured with kisses. Lovely and "well-made" child, always more or less a transference of the woman's narcissism for her burgeoning, balloon-like breasts, or a fetish of a turgescient, vesical balloon which, according to the schedule she wishes, gives her quantities of good excremental commodities, well-formed things, fecund partial objects which are forbidden by her to be retained, or to be yielded at pleasure. These nursing infants must also be clean, polite, well-behaved little parrots, paying due honor to uterine, rectal retentive characteristics. These vulva-vaginal women-grown-up little girls still frustrated for failing to have pleased their fathers, imagining with or without good reason that he did not love them because they were not boys, and nevertheless having loved their mothers sufficiently to want to identify with them-are eternally unsatisfied. Although not wishing to leave him, they consider their husband hateful, because he is unaware of the "sacrifices" made "at home" for the sake of the children who, searching for their own autonomy, through character problems, cannot avoid appearing to be what they have been induced to be by their mothers: pieces of shit. All this is experienced at an emotional distance from their lovers, husbands or children. These women, in order to obtain from their children the achievements they believe are due to their mother, instead of acknowledging their personalities when they are older, compare them to the children of others whom they consider perfect ("look at the Jones' children, look at the Smith's daughters..."). And their husbands are regaled with examples of how other men treat their wives: "He wouldn't do anything of the sort to his wife! Just look at how concerned he is", etc. These women have remained in the phase of an oral vindictive desire for phallic mutilation; they are also a tremendous pain in the neck. Endlessly occupied with those around them because of their permanent state of dissatisfaction, they obstruct the freedom of movement and initiative by which the specifically pre-genital, sexual character of a child-whether male or female-and the male sexual character of a man are manifested when they are authentically genital and authentically coupled to the mother or wife in an atmosphere of freedom.

The vulva-vaginal features of the libido in these narcissistic women (of whom I have provided a picture that is not a caricature), which were originally genital and have remained so, are different from the features of the narcissistic husband and father, which is doubtlessly due to the fact that his genitalia, while it produces fruit, merely assists his companion; he does not bear the child. If he instructs and forms the child socially, he does so by means of transitory, violent and castrating corrections, at times destined to upset and humiliate him/her. In his narcissism, he feels justified in maintaining a valorous social Ego which permits him to maintain a clear conscience. However, he is never the pain in the neck that a mother can be, unquestionably because she harbors secretly within her the fruit abducted from the man, desiring to mold it for her own sake. She has not arrived-lacking an Oedipal resolution-at the genital sublimation without which a woman cannot bring up a child to be autonomous to the point of extricating the child from herself, and of presenting him/her to society.

Seen by these women, their husbands or lovers must-like the mother/father figure during the oral/anal phase-sustain them socially, nourish them, dress them, provide for their pleasure, show them in public as their own phallic significant ones, permit them to dominate and possess their parthenogenetic children, whom they have conceived, given birth to, nourished, possessively cared for, as fetishes of their love for themselves. And the man is expected to admire them for this, to the point of becoming a living mirror through which the women can contemplate themselves, all of which is in lieu of really feeling themselves women. However, in exchange, they never feel tenderness towards their men and whatever they receive, whether in response to their request or gratuitously, it is never what they would have desired.

These women are not always frigid. They experience a nymphomaniac type of orgasm, generally of a clitoral masturbation type, camouflaged with the bit of body which men place at their disposition, above all if their partners are those men who desire child-women, of diffused clitoral-vulva and cutaneous pleasure. They also obtain pleasure in a particular way from their nipples, the childhood masturbation of which is bound to that of the clitoris and to sadist-masochistic fantastical emotions. These women are sexually passive or masochistic, totally dependent on the exchange or barter of their total or relative phallic impotence in the

work sphere but, above all, in the social sphere where they suffer from an acute sense of inferiority. When frustration is piled onto their already frustrated ordinary behavior, there is an immediate psychosomatic reaction, of which everyone must be made aware. In their eyes, suffering and illness compensates in some way for their feeling of inferiority. What appears strange to the observer is the tolerance men demonstrate for these women. While a woman who has invested her vagina in a genital way and thus traversed the anxiety of rape during the Oedipus complex phase can cause men in their desire to be aggressive, this other type of woman, who would be most in need of a similar reaction, usually ends up with a type of man who lets himself be manipulated into caring for her, complaining quietly but all the while permitting her to continue her game which is harmful for the home and children.

At times, when these women have reason to believe that their orgasm would be gratifying for their socially gratifying husbands, they are frigid with them. They are not frigid with their lovers, with whom they take pleasure in coitus to compensate for the phallic power, money or children, which these women do not “steal” from them. In short, their endogenous relationships with their husbands are ambivalent, emotionally aggressive and bodily passive. Or else they are emotionally passive and bodily aggressive, if the erogenous zone of the husband’s penis is elected as a fetish and, even more so, if their social dependence has permitted a transference to a satisfactory economic dependence, like that of a little girl whose daddy-mummy fills her purse and maintains her wardrobe. And these women, whatever their social and cultural milieu, have few cultural, social or political interests, in the broad sense of the term. Their usual excuse is that they never have the time. In fact, their only desire is to immediately overcompensate for what they do not have here with things which they can take materially and touch. In short, they have been blocked before the Oedipus complex and have never overcome their affective backwardness.

It is surprising to see the current emotional and sexual life in France, which is either increasingly blocked before the resolution of Oedipus, or else regressed to that phase (usually after an attempt at a dual escapade, the failed honeymoon “flight”). The Oedipus condition is in the adult transferred from parents (taboo and out-of-date) onto contemporaries, bosses or superiors for their social or sexual success. This is the latest style of affective relationships in society; the Oedipus situation, continually revived with a farcical variation of pawns, alternates (or combines) with a sexuality which can be eroticized by any contact—an eroticization with no reference to the possessor of the body which arouses desire, or to the conscious or unconscious persistence of passionate, pre-genital relationships with the parents, grandparents of both sides, in-laws, collateral and begetting, or contemporaries of both sexes.

Precisely there, at all ages, in these families or in these social groups, resides all the instability of a sexual life of the repetitive, Oedipal type, in which the individual—male or female—feels constantly threatened with castration, a fantasy which increases the man’s standing, since it proves to him that for others he appears powerful, if he were not convinced of this, or that he is threatening to all women (rape fantasy). Married life apparently requires the added spice of an implicit-or explicit-presence of a male or female rival as a threat to the couple. This ‘vaudeville’ situation maintains the libidinal infantilism of the couple and ensures the sale of sentimental literature and love-advice columns.

These intricate Oedipal object relations make up the (so-called genital) erotic style of our culture—“so-called” because the only genital is the erogenous zone of each individual. In the adult, the re-actualization of a pre-Oedipal or Oedipal transference is necessary and sufficient to obtain orgasmic pleasure in a comforting and “narcissising” physiological nervous discharge for men and, occasionally, also for women. For some women, however, it can be pointless if they consider themselves already sufficiently valorized by their legal, vindictive possession of rights over the freedom of option and action of their men and over children—who are phallic fetishes at the service of still infantile homosexual desires (either conscious or unconscious). What such a woman desires of her children, quite beyond the age at which they should have to put up with it, is a relation of mastery over them—they are her slaves and at the same time the objects of the projection of her desire, alternatively homosexual or heterosexual, depending on their sex.

These conditions, at times exclusively narcissistic and sufficient for a manifest heterosexual life for man and woman, demonstrate that, in the social context of our culture-whatever the social or economic status of the individuals observed-there can be a genital functioning during coitus and in its emotional narcissistic corollaries, as well as in the ensuing social consequences (preserving the couple, if one can here use the word couple). This is because physiological maturity is reached, despite a relative Oedipal resolution for the man and a total absence of Oedipal resolution for the women; individuals believe themselves to be lovers, in love, desiring and loving persons. And families, although they are a collage of very heterogeneous pieces within the domestic walls, are judged to be honest and very French.

As to conscious or unconscious homosexuality between adults, when it is consciously accepted, both emotionally and erotically, it often involves to a greater extent both the person and sex of the two human beings, and as such produces symbolic, cultural fruit which are more valid than the fruit-children or works-produced by the usual heterosexual relationship. This is perhaps because, at this general level of libidinal evolution, where the unconscious Oedipal situation is unanimously enhanced-in novels, theater, life-the two persons affirm (by assuming it) a sexual option in opposition to the social consensus (for which the masquerade of bodies apparently coupled according to their complementary sex suffices to reassure common people); or it is perhaps because homosexuality lacks that sad or fatal fecundity borne up to the present more or less, which legitimizes the least valid oral, anal and genital interpersonal and inter-sexual unions. Genital non-fecundity leads two individuals of the same sex who love each other to create, in a Trinitarian way, a work, to give joy mutually, in other words to produce fruit on a symbolic level, which is genitally often conceived in a more authentic fashion than many flesh-and-blood progeny produced by means of rapacious, indifferent or sadist-masochistic intercourse (with or without orgasm).

We must maintain:

1. That clitoral, vulva and vaginal orgasms do not at all mean access to a genital libido, but only to a guiltless, oral and anal, narcissistic investment of the genital channels of the female subject observed;
2. That the erotic fixation on a person of the opposite sex is not in itself significant of a genital love in the emotional sense of the term; that the emotional interest in progeny is not a sign in itself of a genetic object love of a genital style; that all these erotic or emotional fixations can be merely narcissistic; that they are, in our society, almost always organized by or for narcissism, because of the practically total lack of sexual education or of examples of the genital sense of the structure of a couple made up of parents taken as models by children. In our society, the sense of paternity has been practically lost. If boys were educated to fatherhood, alongside an education of girls concerning the maturing of their genitalia-theoretically possible since the advent of birth-control methods-perhaps our Western society would recover its emotional equilibrium, and perhaps young men and women would reach adolescence having totally broken with fixations at the precocious phase of the libido and resolved their dependence on their parents, as well as their ambivalence about the two sexes and the ensuing feeling of frustration combined with a constant, latent castration and rape anxiety(3).

Characteristics of genital love in women

A woman's love for a man who does or does not fecundate her, to whom she is bound by desire and love, is proved not by the guilt which she would feel were she to be unfaithful to him (inevitably produced by the anxiety of castration and rape), but instead by the sense she gives her consecration to the blooming of the social work of the man she loves and of her children, and when she is free to, to her own blooming. She will care indiscriminately for the children of this man whether they have been conceived by her or by another woman.

The desire and the love of a woman who has reached this level of maturity have a value independent of the material comfort which this man may provide, and her attachment to him is not diminished by distance. The good emotional understanding she shares with him will remain intact, be he present or not, mediated by all the linguistic forms between herself and the man and those adults of both sexes close to her; she might

possible desire some adults, but not love and desire them at the same time, because her man brings together these two values. This kind of genital love is not necessarily felt for a man with whom she enjoys superlative orgasms, or for one who has the exclusivity of procuring her orgasms. The quality of the subjective phallic value of this love comes from the perpetually renewed emotional desire to give herself to the one she loves, and not from any local pleasure.

If a woman's libido is genital, the maternal love she bears to her children will be narcissistically de-centered, outside herself, since the child represents the person of its father throughout its education, whether or not she remains herself coupled in her sex to the sex of their father. She does not aim at taking precedence over the father in the hearts of her children, nor does she allow that a second or third companion in her sexual life do so. She gives this maternal love to each of her children as they grow, and to the unique person of each. She encourages them to develop an emotional expression of their own, not molded on hers, a social expression valid for them, for their free, intrinsically creative options, and she is happy if they are happy, even when they leave her for distant parts. She is happy even when their aesthetic or ethical options differ from her own. When her children choose friends or sexual partners, she does not assume the role of a prophet of doom, nor does she attempt to retain them through feelings of guilt. All this, however, is not due to a nobility of soul, but to the simple fact that her libido has reached the level of authentic genital drives, that her archaic and genital drives, which are not all completely satisfied in intercourse, are sublimated in activities which give her pleasure and at the same time are useful to society. Becoming a grandmother, she is content with her lineage and able to provide children and grandchildren with support which does not take on the air of sacrifice; she avoids attempting to appropriate, in the hearts of her grandchildren, the place of their mother or their other grandmother. Briefly, this woman is in all things, according to her own means and daily circumstances, pro-life, as much in daily reality as in its symbolic aspect, because this corresponds to the sexual nature of a genital woman.

Unlike man, who is frequently polygamous, the genital woman does not feel in need of frequent and spectacular intercourses in order to be satisfied narcissistically. Once the moment of intimacy—in which her body and the body of her partner form a single desire, and love and desire feed each other—is past, the woman will find herself impoverished if she in her heart is not enamored of the man she desires. The intercourse in itself is not enough.

That which she desires, as well as her own locus of pleasure, are inaccessible; the opening and the depths of this locus, even at the maximum, can never convey the immense power which overwhelms her in love, because this power de-realizes her with sensual pleasure. The thought of the loved one always awakens in her the awareness of the impotence of her own love, for she believes that she still has given almost nothing to him, apart from her strength and her children, in exchange for the gratification of having for herself a real man, and not a dream to love in silence, perhaps even unknowingly. Being aware of it in an entirely sensible way provides her with a happiness which keeps her alive and fecund at every moment of her life, even during the most banal of occupations—the care of her body, her children, or the house—which would become merely obsessive and sterile if the one she loves did not give them a sense beyond the senses.

That is why, in many cultures, virgins and widows transfer their love upon the symbolic figure of a god, without repressing anything. Could this be the fringe of the imaginary? In dedicating themselves to works whose managers and legal guardians they are, they feel gratified and do not experience that frustration experienced by many widows who have not reached the genital level and by many women who nevertheless have partners and sexual satisfaction.

This gift of themselves confers to some of these women a particular radiance and confirms that the genital dialectic produces its fruit even when the woman who desires and loves cannot physically be in confluence with the one she loves. When these adult women consecrate their genitality to these works, they are obeying the laws of the genital dialectic, for it is symbolic of their heartfelt gift in a dimension beyond that of the work of the flesh symbolically included in it. In fact, they do not repress their libido, but transfer it onto a work where their drives find satisfaction.

This pseudo-oblation of the genital stage, which could appear to be an authentic, disinterested oblation of devoted beings, is in fact the proof that the genital dialectic (always of an erogenous, symbolic libidinal nature, even in love between two actively corporeal human beings) is fruitful, and this will give more fruits, and so on. These women make life their work. Such a power of true devotion-chaste and observant of the rules governing it-is also the result of a sublimated genital eroticism. Some of these women-whose genital maturity is the source of their social activity have, when their mission is working with the young, a vitalizing and creative maternal impact on those who take them as models, as ideal Ego at a particular point in their evolution. Obviously, among these women taking care of the young there are symbolically sterile women, but are there not more, proportionally, among those who have actually given birth to flesh-and-blood children? As to women who are faithful to and happy with their man, and not masochistic, what gives them joy-which cannot be dissociated from their total choice of their men-is to perceive through the trials of daily life how negligible these trials appear when compared to the pleasure experienced in placing their intelligence, forces and hearts at the service of symbolic, social manifestations more lasting than their own person and which, like physical children for the wives of men, have more right to life than their own person; the conservation and maintenance of those works to which they are devoted have more ethical value than their own preservation.

If it is not a search for either the male organ or orgasm in itself, what then is the specifically feminine way of genital satisfaction?

This question merits attention. Is it not perhaps the transposed effusions of her open sex summoning the phallus, which signifies by its spermatic outpouring a fecundity that she desires only if the man to whom she has given herself desires her? This effusion is expressed then in the gift to him of her body and forces, to the point of an eventual renunciation of her somatic fecundity, so that she may be his spouse, identified with the brilliance of his career-for him his major work and scope-of his material, affective and social success.

To the degree that a woman, beyond the phallic appearance of bodies, accedes to the emotional immanence of the reality of her sex, she introspectively comprehends herself less than she does men. But once more, since she has become detached from clitoral masturbation, finding it of little interest, she finds this a narcissistic wound to her intelligence, which, like the intelligence of man, is in search of logic and reason based on mechanisms originating in pre-genital and phallic sublimation. All these authentic and dynamic motivations are, of course, sexual. And her sex-which she experiences in her innermost depths, whatever she says about her options-remains for her intangible, inconspicuous, invisible, polymorphous in her erotic sensations (those most apt to be verbalized and most localized peripherally), in the functions of her body (the most ineffable and most diffused in her deepest intimacy), in her entire person, even beyond temporal and spatial limits, and thus, completely unreasonable, without that being surprising for her. This sex which she assumed as a child and never renounced, is for her a permanent source of unconditioned emotion-a formally abstruse sex beyond the dialectic of fecundity and the emotions it promises so out of proportion to those it provides, so that mothers, when they reveal the matrix usage of their uterus, innocently confuse their viscera uterus and viscera heart, so much more honorable, perhaps, but perhaps also so much more plausible.

As to the fertility of all the levels of her sexual drives, its value also cannot be estimated from the bodily point of view, or even from the point of view of the heart, because human beings are essentially ethical beings, and therefore, their sense of fecundity lies in the sense of fruit borne of their fruit-in the sublimated genetic sense, and not in the sense of formal childbirth nor in the nursing care or education which a woman is justified in lavishing on her progeny. Nor does this sense lie in the spectacular performances deriving from the erectile phallic ethic, or in the social success deriving from the anal aesthetic, despite their occasionally being flattering. The suffering and joys of a woman are impossible to evaluate, incommunicable and incomprehensible; they are also nevertheless an inexhaustible source, due to her joy in loving.

But this is all a question of a healthy genital psychology. But then, what is a healthy woman?

The mourning for the living fruit of love symbolized by the child: reawakening of castration, its

anxiety, and the overwhelming force of the death drives

The death of her child, above all if it is the child of the man she loves, is the worst ordeal a woman can experience, whatever the child's age. This terrible experience requires-if she is to remain alive and genitally loving, in both the personal and the sexual sense-the greatest of sacrifices. She must first stand the test of her feelings of guilt, ensuing from her genetic, ever-narcissistic Superego. If he had been small, had she taken sufficient care of him? Had she prepared him sufficiently for life, had she been sufficiently maternal? Had she contaminated him with her ideas instead of letting him go his way in time and thus avoid that which is a deserting of one's post, death? At that post, the woman finds herself a sentinel before him, at the dividing line between life and death drives; through this line, aggressiveness enters at the service of defending the growth of the body of her child and the phallic morphology of living beings which no-one has the right to destroy gratuitously is respected. The death of anyone she loves inevitably puts a woman in question, but the death of a child, male or female, is far more than that. It is the loss, sometimes the ruin, of the symbolic sense which she had given to her life when she gave birth to that child. It is also the mourning of her narcissism decentralized on the child which encounters in this trial the expression of her partner's grief. He often reacts to his sorrow in a completely different way than she does. She encounters the pain of other members of the family, at times their indifference, at times even downright delight on the part of brothers and sisters (one less rival). How many trials, how much impotence and solitude!

It is also, and above all, the narcissistic temptation of the death drives to which the woman is subjugated far more than the man, above all if she is sexually evolved, that is, when her genital options are free of phallic narcissism aimed at her own person. It is the narcissistic temptation to take refuge in fantasies, in magic, in all that which binds her, in her imagination, once more to that child who became her missing limb, denying her own temporal-spatial existence, which no longer appears to have any sense. And she cannot, does not know how to, help her companion who suffers. Of what use is she then? And no one can convince her that such an ordeal could ever have an end.

Finally, and perhaps in a beneficial way, her aggressiveness against nature, that inhuman mother, is transferred onto both the maternal and paternal gods-or for monotheists the God-who today has become impotent or a pre-Oedipal, jealous and vindictive entity. How, if He exists, could He allow the life of someone so young to end before she had died? How could He have allowed that a creature so made for life be cut down in the flower of youth? And, worst of all, when she thinks of her child lying there in the cold earth, she feels the violence of outrage and hatred. Her howls of desperation, however, will do nothing to attenuate her pain, which is worse than the evisceration which as a child she had imagined as something hideous, but which today, in the symbolic reality of her body, she experiences as a love she wishes were powerful enough to restore life to that human being who has ceased to live.

The only possibility for a woman who sees her family around her-the little ones begging for her attention, her husband so much in need of her-is a renewed, daily acceptance upon each awaking of the anxiety of primary castration which, narcissistically, is reawakened and multiplied in its strength for having been added to a mother's suffering due to the death of her real child. When her despair is mitigated, she thinks: does not that loss, which concerns an imaginary possession which she had mistakenly believed real, signify freedom from the destiny which she believed to have given to her child, but which she now realizes she had never truly given, like everything she believes she gave? This final thought is most helpful in bearing up under the mutilation, in order that she once more permit those closest to her to laugh, again to experience pleasure and joy, and she once more provide her husband with words demonstrating that she is always there for him, beyond her ordeal. She derives no narcissistic gratification from this interior working-through. The experience of such, like death, mourning is inconceivable to anyone who has not overcome it. In fact, actually a part of her has died with that child, who is irreplaceable as all human beings are. However, the memory of the child is bound to so much of the joy of her youth and the life of the couple leads her to realize that she has not let the child carry off everything and that the moment has come, with the lessening of her suffering, to give him his total destiny.

It is only then that she is able to give to that daughter, that son, the right to death which finally liberates her without in any way canceling the tragic moment of the final transformation of her genitality in her maturity. Similar to the earth after a cyclone, when months, even years, must pass before the pleasant landscape is recreated, is the mother who has lost her child and overcome this ordeal. Her husband finds her once more joyous and ready to give herself to him. Her children can speak of the dead without seeing their mother's face immediately cloud over. She too takes pleasure in remembering moments shared, and her friends find once more the person they knew more serene, more detached. She has chosen the game of living and no longer dwells on her sorrow. When I said that she had been threatened by death drives, what I intended was not what is commonly called melancholic depression, which is quite another thing, as it was not a question of her being tempted to take her own life, nor was it a feeling of being undeserving of life, although, in a not yet genital woman, that self-destructiveness can arise. More often, however, that repeated castration which her destiny has inflicted upon her stimulates the evolution of her libido in the direction of a genital development in reality and in sublimated forms she otherwise would never have experienced. Perhaps she will become one of those rare persons who succeeds in helping others to bear in a less solitary way a loss similar to her own, doing so without affectation, without pathogenic pity, without identifying herself to them.

Can a woman signify her desire to herself?

The woman, as a sexual female, is for the human species an unthinkable phenomenon. As Freud stated, one woman is also a human being. She judges her own sexuality as a human being with the lame, residual homosexual logic of her pre-genital childhood. It is therefore thanks to her bisexuality that she can attempt to consider herself in her genital role. That which she is for the male representatives of the species she is also for herself: a carnal creature symbolizing the intangible the more she gives of herself, symbolizing the senseless the more she speaks, and symbolizing the a-ethics the more moral she is. A woman can only formulate that judgment and at the same time can only feel gratified to be, for the man she desires and loves, the absurd necessity of his own desire and the essential accomplice of the incarnation of the "I" in an encounter she is incapable of assuming in a lucid way.

Translated from the French by Joan Tambureno

Notes:

1 This text is the last chapter of *Sexualité féminine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996) by Françoise Dolto. We thank Catherine Dolto-Tolitch for having allowed us to publish this text in English.

2 In French, pregnancy is also called *état intéressant*, an interesting state [Translator's note].

3 It is not certain that, without a genital sexual education of young males and females, more freedom given to females, in order to avoid their being victims of men who render them mothers before they know themselves as women, modifies this social tableau. I would energetically hope so, but I fear that what are today referred to as desired children-those allowed to be born-are nothing more than children who respond to the needs of women who are bored or need this phallic confirmation. (Author's note)