

# **Psychic Bisexuality, the Feminine and Femininity in the Era of Gender Theory**

## **Introduction**

The idea for this paper arose following a conference on the theme of psychic bisexuality held at the APPQ. Jacques André had been invited to debate with others who presented on gender theory. To my great surprise the concepts of bisexuality, sexual identity and gender were discussed and given meanings entirely different than those used in psychoanalysis.

Several questions came to mind:

-What becomes of the powerful disturbance generated by the differences between the sexes as well as the drives when they are replaced by gender neutrality?

-What profound and worrisome changes can be expected when the freedom to act upon one's desire and the realization of omnipotent fantasies seem to overlap?

-Would there evolve a new cultural Superego for which forbidden transgression does not exist? How would that cultural Superego affect the individual Superego?

I have not extensively studied the field of Gender Studies and this paper does not aim to enter into debate with them. However an overview of the concepts led me to question some of the terms I often use without deeper reflection or awareness of their meanings: psychic bisexuality and its relation to drives, the feminine, femininity and more recently, gender. This paper is born out of these reflections and represents a process of thinking that will require more time and depth.

## **Gender in Psychoanalysis**

The notion of gender is widely popular among sociologists, sexologists and feminists of the current era. I was quite surprised to discover there were no definitions of the term in the three French language dictionaries of psychoanalysis I consulted: Laplanche et Pontalis, Alain de Mijolla and Le Guen. The term however did appear in the 1968 English

language work of Robert Stoller entitled *Sex and Gender*. In his article “Le genre, sexe et le sexual” Jean Laplanche noted that the only translation of Stoller’s book into French, *Recherches sur l’identité sexuelle* (1978, Paris, Gallimard), illustrates the difficulty to integrate the concept of “gender” for the French Psychoanalytic theory. The sudden appearance of this new couple sex/gender posed significant difficulties in translation. In German “geschlecht” means both “gender” and “sex” which can explain why we do not find this distinction in Freud’s texts. Classical French psychoanalytic thought also seems to find it difficult to integrate either the term or idea of “gender”. In French the term is used first in grammar, as a category based on the natural distinction between the sexes; feminine, masculine or neutral. It is also used in biology in terms of a classification that differentiates between closely related species such as *Canis*, referring to a dog, wolf, coyote and others. Lastly, the term gender is used in sociology to refer to the biologically-based sexual identity from historical, cultural or symbolic perspectives.

In his text of 2003, which despite its date of publication remains especially pertinent, Laplanche attempts to respond to the question “why introduce gender into psychoanalysis?” His considerations brought him to elaborate on the functions of the triad of gender, sex and “the sexual”<sup>1</sup>. For Laplanche, “gender” appears first in time and in awareness. It is a term which is plural even if it usually refers to the duality of masculine/feminine. He offers a beautiful image of gender as the result of a “bombardment of messages” which signify that we should think in terms of “assignation”, as a process, a complex set of “acts” which extend into the language and significant behaviours of the surrounding environment: those of mother and father as well as those of siblings and extended family. Laplanche disagrees with Stoller’s definition of gender as a “socially defined sex” in contrast to the conception of “biological sex”. For Laplanche, gender is “socio-cultural” and not only social. He also rejects the evolving feminist assumption for which gender translates, symbolizes, constructs or destroys biological

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<sup>1</sup> Translator’s note: “The sexual” which substitutes an “a” for the “e” in the French term “sexuel” is Laplanche’s way of designating the part of infantile sexuality which forever remains enigmatic, unknowable and independent of sexual development and maturity in both adult and child. In the generalized seduction model, it is part of the Enigma of the Other, an unwitting sexual infiltrate transmitted unconsciously alongside the caretaker’s attachment-related ministrations which exerts seductive power over the child’s psyche impelling it to work, to translate the enigmatic sexual messages embedded in the adult’s communications.

sex. Laplanche maintains that the traditional opposition of sociology and biology cannot be sustained because sex in relationship to the symbolization of gender is not biological sex but is “the sex of a fantasized anatomy which has been forged by the human condition.” This is in contrast to Freud who speaks of an individual’s pre-subjective, primitive identification with the parents. Laplanche writes of a pre-subjectivized, primitive identification via the “socius” of the individual.

Laplanche defines “sex” both as the act of sexual reproduction and as its human symbolization which solidifies the duality of presence/ absence, phallic/castrated. He uses another term, “The Sexual” which is a neologism in French, to refer to multiple, polymorphic dimensions of sexuality. It is Freud’s polymorphic perverse sexuality, the discovery of that part of sexuality which is essentially repressed, unconscious and composed of fantasy. To cite Laplanche, “The Sexual is the unconscious residue of the repression-symbolization of gender by sex.” (p.153).

Jacques André (2015) asks whether psychoanalysis would benefit from integrating the notion of gender within the psychic apparatus. He notes that the representation of the difference between the sexes was already present during the caveman era but that the biological and symbolic knowledge of the phenomena’s that lead somebody to recognize oneself as belonging to one sex or the other began yesterday! In the statement “it’s a boy, it’s a girl” the sight of the sex begets the naming of the gender. It is essential to remember that for human beings perception is never cut off from experience: there is no such thing as naïve perception! The symbolic world precedes sight and orients perception but the difficulty does not end there. At the symbolic level “difference is a division by sex”. (2015, p.172). This difference attempts to bring order where it ceased to exist, but this order is immediately threatened by the polymorphic chaos of the infantile sexual which sexualizes everything: mouth, anus, skin and in the same vein, that which makes the parents of the two sexes objects of irrepressible desire. The Oedipus complex makes a mockery of the difference between the sexes and the generations because as it becomes disoriented by the lost instinct and the genital phase. With humour and perspicacity, Jacques André proposes to replace the term “gender” which is missing a bit of sex with the words “psychic sex”.

In 2017, Jacques André elaborates further on these reflections. He writes that the sex of the future baby feeds the reveries and fantasies of the future parents during pregnancy. At the time of birth, reality breaks in and if that which is seen stimulates the hallucinatory more than the perceptual, the impact will be significant. "The imagined anatomy is destiny" (p. 26) therefore if the unconscious desire of the parents does not correspond to the biological sex of the child, the psychic sex wished for by the parents will always prevail over the anatomical sex because "unconscious psychic determinism is otherwise less plastic and displaceable than social determinism..." It is important to remember that the sexual polymorphism which characterizes infantile sexuality will once again and always be found in the infantile sexuality of the adult except when oral or anal fixations prevent it.

Gender theory seems to transform this polymorphism into a multiplicity of genders beyond the two: girl, boy, gay, lesbian, intersexual, transsexual, drag queen/king. There are seventy-two gender names that are recognized as "sexual identities" in the United Kingdom. Gender overrides sex. According to Jacques André "the multiplication of genders, the passing from one to another drowns the duality of the sexes in diversity" (page ??) My thinking on the current explosion of social advocacy for the right to detach one's identity from the male-female anatomical distinctions is still not developed enough to permit me to elaborate further. Nonetheless, it seems to me that the free play of fantasy is sidelined either through its direct translation into reality and/or through the confusion of fantasy play with concrete freedom. If there is any psychic liveliness in gender theories what form can it take when psychic conflict seems difficult to tolerate and when preliminary excitations and genital primacy seem mutually exclusive.

When designation through language becomes a manifestation of omnipotence severed from its unconscious roots, the freedom that is claimed to choose one's sex risks becoming a purely theoretical construct, an imaginary realization that negates biological reality. "Once psychic reality has been set free and has triumphed over all conformity, psychotic distress will prevail rather than freedom and hedonism" (André, 2017, p.28).

Between the conscious choice of one's sex and the natural fact of being "born this way", such as gay or trans, what remains of psychic bisexuality? What does this term mean in

psychoanalysis? How does psychic bisexuality link with the theorized primary feminine? What becomes of femininity in this new context?

### **Psychic Bisexuality**

In 1905, Freud wrote in *The Three Essays on Sexuality* that if bisexuality is not taken into account, we will not be able to reach an understanding of the expressions of sexuality observed in men and women.

In 1930, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud lamented the obscurity of the doctrine of bisexuality with the regret that it did not yet fit into the theory of drives. In 1931, he pointed out that bisexuality is manifested more clearly in women who, contrary to men, possess two anatomical sexual centres: the vagina which is feminine and the clitoris which is masculine. He added that for a woman, childhood sexuality is essentially clitoral as the vagina is completely absent as a locus of pleasure. The eternally incomplete passage from masculine to feminine posed a problem for Freud. He postulated that this change from masculine to feminine corresponds to the change in love object which moves from the mother to the father. Freud's hypothesis of the feminine as uniquely passive and castrated has currently come to be questioned by many analysts.

In 1933, Freud saw anatomy as contributing to bisexuality and thus not only psychically constructed. Certain quantities of hormones of the opposite sex are always produced regardless of gender because the adrenal cortex is a source of non-gamete androgens and estrogens. He even wrote that "bisexuality has then been transferred to psychic life by submissiveness to the anatomy" .

### **Hypothesis regarding the Nature of Psychic Bisexuality (PB)**

Since the introduction of Freud's notion of bisexuality, many diverse and sometimes contradictory perspectives on the complex origins and constituents of Psychic Bisexuality have evolved. Several authors have understood PB as "the best shared thing in the world" (André, 2017, p.8) and that human sexuality is distorted given that it is no longer controlled by instinct. Sexuality has preserved the strength of the instinct but is distinguished from it because it is inextricably linked with fantasy, is impossible to satisfy and it changes its

object and aim: the drive for example can invest thought. PB is deemed originary because it is a representation that develops when psychic life has yet to make internal/ external or psyche/soma differentiations. Is not PB also a primitive figure of infantile sexuality arising from early identifications with the genders of both parents and with the desires of which they are the object? Is it not a reaction to castration? Does PB precede the differentiation between sexes or is it a response to it?

For Jacques André (2015), this binary way of posing the question destroys the complexity of the concept. He proposes that whether bisexuality is a psychic play engendered by sex differences, a game that also combines desire and identification and to which he adds that bisexualities are multiple in nature. In this he aligns himself with Catherine Chabert (2016) for whom PB stems from the registration of both sexes, male and female in each individual. She situates PB according to two polarities: one at the narcissistic origins of psycho-sexuality and the other as heir to the Oedipus complex. These two polarities alternate and/or are condensed within the precipitants of identification that emerge out of the necessity of object choice. According to Chabert the child would be bound to overinvest bisexuality in order to be protected from the pain of exclusion generated by the primal scene. In salvaging the narcissism of the child, bisexuality favours the consolidation of the ego, its protection and defense. Bisexuality contributes to the psychoplasticity and mobility that permits the move from one sex to another and integrates the psychic conditions of creativity. Bisexuality thus signals the existence of the masculine and the feminine as well as their singular and plural configurations rather than the confusion between them.

### **Clinical Vignette**

Pascal is the eldest of three children. His mother, initially described as reserved and discreet, seems to have had a very fusional relationship with my patient. His otherness is never acknowledged; he is the stand-in for all the missing objects from his mother's childhood and becomes her confidant, her alter ego, the receptacle of her pain, her helper.

The patient's father first and briefly appears to be a loving father, present and animated, yet it soon becomes apparent that he is an alcoholic, irresponsible and intimidating at

moments of crisis or when he threatens his son if he complains about his all-powerful mother.

I sometimes wonder if the experience of mother-child completeness which the mother seems to have wanted to prolong did not become an experience of intrusion for Pascal. He may have been subjected to an excitation for which he had no words which he could not metabolize, understand and symbolize. Would the virulence of a primordial incest fantasy have instilled a primary femininity against which he tried to defend or protect himself via a surface masculinity? Could this fantasy have allowed him the claiming of a conscious bisexuality which might have constituted a mode of defensive psychic organization?

In adolescence, Pascal described himself as totally overwhelmed by the expectations of a male friend who, in the utmost secrecy, confided to no one but Pascal, his intention to commit suicide. His friend's troubling questions preoccupied Pascal to the point that he wished he himself would die in his sleep.

I say: "Die...to return to mother's womb...or to manage to leave it?"

After a moment of silence, Pascal went on to say that at that period he was attracted to women as much as to men. He added that he was far too busy trying to save his mother, his siblings and his friend to find the time to think about his sexual orientation. After some homosexual experimentation during adolescence, he went for women "because it's easier". He had a few very involved love affairs and even lived with a woman for several years. He became engaged, but ended the relationship just before the wedding.

The patient then lived alone for several years until he met a man who had all the qualities that attract him: intelligence, culture, interest in current events and the arts, openness and honesty. Pascal said that if he had met a woman with the same qualities he would have been drawn to her because contrary to his partner who identifies as a homosexual, Pascal identifies as bisexual. In his experience of love, passivity and activity, femininity and masculinity, sexual object drive and the narcissistic drive of the ego intertwine to the point

where my patient wants it all without being able to identify his principal attraction. Can we imagine that the maintenance of such ambivalence and ambiguity utilizes the potentiality of originary bisexuality? Can we entertain the possibility that psychic bisexuality may at times come to the rescue of a devaluation related to an identification with a despised parental figure by lending support to the belief that one does not have to choose and therefore there is nothing to lose.

I say: "Choosing is taking...but it is also mourning!"

He says he wants it all because it is the only way to attain his ideal: "to be the best and to be acknowledged as the best". Seeing him at once shy and demonstrative, listening and affirming, self-effacing and flamboyant, humble and proud...feminine and masculine...I wonder if his conscious bisexuality could not represent a failure in the integration of psychic bisexuality or a form of de-sexualization linked to idealization because to recognize one's own gender is to acknowledge one's incompleteness. I also sometimes think that in his later heterosexual relationships, this ideal of completeness allows him not only to stave off the engulfment anxieties that still plague him, but also to disengage from phallic castration anxieties related stimulated by the sight of the hollow female sex.

When Freud (1931) claimed that the female anatomy, clitoris-erectile-external and vagina-container-internal, fostered the psychic bisexuality of the woman, he unfortunately came to advocate the abandonment of the clitoris in favour of the vagina as the site of sexual excitation and satisfaction. At the IPA Congress in London in 2019, Dominique Scarfone stated that Freud had performed a symbolic excision which marked the end of the Psychic Bisexuality he had previously identified.

To date, the connections between drive theory and that of Psychic Bisexuality remain obscure. Contemporary psychoanalysis reflects on it in terms of psychic organization, in terms of the stage upon which the libido and the subject's conflictuality of the subject interact, the site where the drama of the rejection and/or appropriation of one's sexual identity ensues. As Freud asserted, the sex drive never allows for complete satisfaction



because the ultimate object is but a substitute for the oedipal object which is itself the substitute for the primary object, the homologous mother of all the first moments of life.

Infantile sexuality is the “always-already-there” that never goes away, embodied in the fantasies of returning to mother’s womb, the act of devouring, seduction, castration and the primal scene. These fantasies are a form of psychic processing of the excitation. Prior to the acquisition of words, this psychic processing takes the form of figuration. Access to language permits the later elaboration of symbolization. I wonder if when it appears, the primal scene fantasy might not be an unconscious manifestation of originally Psychic Bisexuality which is neither a developmental phase nor a consequence of identification.

At different periods of reflection, Jacques André speaks of female sexuality (1994-1995) of the originary feminine (2002) and still later of originary bisexuality. What might be the possible link between these two originary elements: the feminine and/or Psychic Bisexuality?

### **The Feminine**

In light of the excessiveness and timelessness...the feminine, on its dark side, has lost nothing over... the millennia...neither of its insistence nor its appetite.

Jacques André, 2002

Based on a 3500 year old text, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Jacques André introduces us to the feminine in its demanding, intransigent and insatiable facets. He adds that if there is passivity then it is of a unique sort because it is positive, instinctual and thus imperious.

In his early writings, *Studies in Hysteria*, Freud also introduced a feminine that is not based on the elements of what is missing, but on penetration by a foreign body which would threaten a “space” with which the feminine is identified. Hysterical women of that period spoke of a sense of “too muchness” implanted into the psyche at the moment of a traumatic experience. When Emmy forbids Freud from moving, speaking or touching her she gives us the impression of fiercely wanting to protect an intimate space...The female sex, “this hollow space” seems to be a foreshadowing of “the void” of the unconscious of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the place of the repressed, of disconnection, of the

unacceptable. Unfortunately this Freud, spokesman of female protest, will give way to the Freud of dualities, mind-body, spirituality-sensuality, masculine-feminine in *Femininity* (1933?). The woman restricted to plaiting and weaving becomes victim to the worst system of social repression: the prohibition against thinking. The Freudian approach to femininity is almost to the point of disappearing and gives way to a femininity associated with absence and negation.

### **Characteristics of the Feminine**

Helen, an active, intellectual professional who is mother to three children in their twenties, is an autonomous woman, assertive and independent who does not tolerate the attempts of her peers who might suggest she do less. Paradoxically, she turns away from it all if one of her children is in pain or need. Her friends tell her she is stimulating, her husband finds her exhausting and her conjugal life has remained passionate “perhaps because it was interspersed with several affairs”, she says. She is receptive to those who are not afraid to struggle, more distant and scolding of those who “give in to complaining and inertia”.

When she was young she was described as a “daddy’s girl”. Even if at times her father set limits on some of her dare-devil desires, he was mostly permissive, open to difference, to her creative and audacious experiments, like travel, African safaris and her welcoming of the unknown.

Without seeking their approval, Helene attracted the same kind of permissive attitude and presence from some of her employers as she had known with her father. In contrast, she totally ignored and defied those superiors who were controlling and fastidious. She detested those who built their lives on appearances and financial success, admiring the determination and audacity of certain innovators, sometimes deploring her own missed opportunities.

After several years of analysis, Helene one day told me that she sometimes has a dream in which she has to run from a suffocating mother who locks up her daughter, like the

mother of Federico Garcia Lorca in his novel *La maison de Bernarda*, and she escapes in the nude. She is first rescued by a man on a horse then she is alone astride the horse, riding naked along the sea shore. Freud wrote that anatomy is destiny. My patient's dream leads me to think that *wanting* in a woman is a destiny much more tyrannical than anatomy. Is her intense activity not part of a never-ending attempt to sever a link in order to move towards another: to cut the link with mother in order to move toward the father, tearing herself away from father and in the best of all worlds, riding alone for a moment then going toward the lover and perhaps wanting a child? What energy she must deploy in order to obtain that which she desires, to which she aspires and what she demands. The plight of a woman, her destiny, seems more tyrannical and energy-consuming than the destiny to which her anatomy could reduce her.

Much later on, Helene speaks of a fantasy that troubles her because it is the one that has the power every time to bring her to orgasm. She imagines a man looking at her "greedily" without trying to hide his intentions. He approaches, tears her blouse and penetrates her on front of everyone and she climaxes. In the ensuing silence, I think of the creativity required at the conception of a fantasy, albeit passive, and I say:

"Passivity makes you climax...a creative passivity..."

The patient replies that having been determined and assertive in her life, she has always hidden this fantasy that makes her feel a little ashamed. She adds that she is not quite sure how to explain it, but it seems that all of a sudden there is something of the insatiable in this fantasy.

For my part, I think of the words of Jacques André (2017)," that which makes men and women think is not what brings them to orgasm. Rationally, socially, consciously we demand that men and women be treated equally, but our practice shows us ad nauseam that the unconscious ignores equality as well as inequality". Psychoanalysis clearly illustrates that all which is intolerable to the ego, passivity, loss of control, the removal of boundaries, the intrusion of penetration, the abuse of power and possession, are precisely what contribute to sexual pleasure. The passive drive speaks a complicated language: a language that separates my patient, the author of the fantasy, from the agent

of the scene of the fantasy, her lover, who must take action. Her fantasy demonstrates the degree to which passivity as a drive is not synonymous with inertia. My patient's fantasy brings me closer to the primal scene where the child is a spectator, passive but overwhelmed by the adult sexuality that bursts into her world. Jacques André (1995) writes that "this passivity begins with fear and transitions toward orgasm and an excess of pleasure" (p.122).

We might ask if it is to contain, put order in the unbound and threatening sexuality of the feminine that men and women appeal to phallic logic and its differentiating power.

### **The Confluence of Feminine and Maternal**

Hélène Parat (2002) posits that the confluence of the feminine with the maternal which manifests in the erotic, nourishing breast provokes such terror in the imaginations of men that it annihilates fetishistic, anal and splitting defenses. Does the mother become unthinkable when the feminine and the maternal cannot be more distinguished from one another? We could say that reason fails before the excess of the drive associated with the erotic-maternal breast and that the archaic anxieties of fusion-confusion, of disorganization and psychic annihilation take over. Often then, to recover equilibrium, a feeling of safety, men and women separate the mother from the woman: a man loves one woman and has sex with another. A woman ceases being a woman as she becomes a mother!

Far from the convergence of the feminine and the maternal, Dominique Mainqueneau describes the "femme fatale", fatal because she undoes the economy of the good and the bad. Fatal to man, because she undermines his values: presence-absence, inside-outside, status and identity often linked to place. As opposed to the domesticated spouse, the femme fatale escapes from the house and the obligation to reproduce. She hovers on the margins of established order, crosses the generational boundaries, but never attempts to impose her power. She does not create an alternative world which would bring her into the logic of men: she arises in a space that defies inside and outside, an internal space which she may take everywhere because her identity is not an issue of place, it is

a way of being. No one could lock her in a box even if it were golden. Are mythical women like Eve, Dalida, Salome and Carmen solely the product of a man's imagination? I like to believe that we may find something of this feminine essence in women who explore the wilderness or cross the Atlantic Ocean in a sailboat, but also in those who choose their lives, those who return to study after passionately living their children's childhood, those who dare to take on creative jobs, those who become owner's of a business and so on. These women embody their integrity no matter the cost! Their originary internal space is marked by drive and excess.

My patient Robert who for a long time described himself as a lucky man, in love with a loving wife who was able to tolerate his need "to wander", such as going off to live in a camper for a year or more and the father of three children. He recently disclosed that for the last few years, he has been unable to resist a woman who is nomadic, sensual, lively and unable to make attachments, who comes in and out of his life without warning. He has enjoyed the greatest sexual pleasures with her and has also suffered the most in love because of her.

Occasionally I wonder whether the insatiable, devouring woman is not over-represented. Femininity, which is more of a behavioural style, is no longer in fashion, nor is seduction. On the other hand, sexual acting out and prowess, as in having several "one night" lovers, seems to be more the trend. They recently reported on Radio Canada that especially in Quebec it is women who are making sexual advances toward men. Is this the insatiable woman or the counter-phobic woman who is seeking to flee the passive drive in a manic way? I sometimes wonder while daydreaming if women's capacity to open up to greater drive quantities would give them access to greater representation: a strong ego would then be needed to receive and bind this "increased surge", give it shape and symbolize it.

## **Femininity**

At the same time as I was questioning whether introjective identification of the "infans" with the mother's feminine was a prelude to the identification with the genital femininity of the mother, I encountered several authors who define femininity as a "masquerade"

(Andre, J., Chabert C., Mainguineau, D., Schaeffer J.) Femininity is highlighted by what is seen, what shows, what is exhibited, what is externalized. Dresses, jewelry, perfumes, and hair styles: the female body as a whole becomes phallic. That which is made to be seen must capture the gaze of the man in order to awaken his desire while reassuring his virility, for these adornments mask the castrated sex that might provoke the castration anxiety of the lover. This type of femininity rests upon the woman's recognition of her own castration and her integration of phallic logic. By becoming phallic is she attempting to displace, cancel out or repress the frighteningly excessive feminine drive?

Femininity may then be a strategy for the purpose of taming the feminine. Cournut-Janin (1993) writes that in order that the little girl resist the desire for her sex,( the feminine gaping hole ) to incorporate that of her father, the mother must invest wholly the body of her daughter thereby cancelling, repressing or shifting the investment of her sex. Femininity would thus be the transmitted repression of a protective phallic decoy

However femininity is not limited to female sexuality. If we define it as a set of characteristics that describes a woman, conscious and unconscious, we must acknowledge that culture influences the secondary identifications which constitute femininity. We can see traces of this in the social roles attributed to women and in the trans-generational transmission of these roles. The intra-psychic specificity of femininity is then split between what it owes to culture and to the theories of infantile sexuality.

Could the excitation associated with maternal care give rise to engulfment anxieties where it becomes impossible to differentiate from the mother in order to exist? If so, then castration would offer something imaginable, something delineated that would introduce the presence of the father between mother and daughter. The anticipated excitation of the encounter would initiate a fundamental psychic separation from the mother. The Oedipus separates the daughter from the mother who suddenly becomes a woman and a rival. Two excesses threaten the relationship: a mother who is too much of a woman and a mother who is only a mother.

Simone told me in the first meetings that: "I killed my mother a long time ago!" She described her mother as absent, depressive, insignificant and presented herself as her

father's only love object whereas in reality she has four sisters who do not exist in the material any more than does the mother. A "freeze frame" which is what I call her frozen immutable memories, shows her father seated in an armchair watching her do her homework in her room the door to which must remain open at all times. In all her "memories", there is no one but her and him. After a few years of analysis she receives a box of photos of her parents from her youngest sister. To her great surprise she is confronted by images of a stylish mother, elegant and pretty, frequently locked in an embrace with the father who is looking at her with love and admiration. It is such a shock that she cannot look at the photos again for months.

I say: "It seems like it is intolerable to realize that your mother is a woman!"

The freeze frame then begins to move. Behind the father's armchair, mother is putting on makeup and doing her hair in front of the mirror. A memory returns: the father purchases a violin for his wife who once used to play: surprisingly, the parents never offered lessons to any of their children. Little by little, the empty gaze of her mother in whom my patient said she never saw herself, no longer seemed to be that of the Dead Mother of André Green, but that of a mother who is too invested in being a lover, a lover who deprives her of a mother and betrays her love.

I wonder if for my patient the seductive femininity of her mother could have been intrusive. Did the display of her mother's attractiveness and her seductive power suggest to my patient that her mother had incorporated an invisible penis rendering her wholly phallic?

Her refusal of femininity, her tendency to "masculinize" herself in that she never wore a dress or makeup and was both skilled and interested in construction work as well as her hatred of the primal scene went as far as sexual frigidity. Her femininity became exclusively maternal as she completes herself with her child rather than her partner. Her hysterical seductiveness seems to be a simulacrum of femininity, an attempt to identify with the seducing mother that is thwarted by an excessive amount of aggression. Directed exclusively to a range of married men who are married to very feminine women, her advances, while never consummated remind me of unconscious attacks against the mother. I wonder if her refusal of femininity masks a voracious, imperious femininity that

could reclaim the father, only him for her alone: a feminine made voracious because she was never filled by a breast that desired her nourishment.

During the settling of their parents' estate, Simone wanted nothing but the violin. She takes lessons for year, but her teacher notices that her interpretation of the music albeit technically perfect, is cold and devoid of emotion. It is devoid of any disturbance, expectation, desire, absence, suffering or joy. Could this coldness be an attempt to close the lid on the "raw" threatening feminine that dwells inside or to deny suffering linked with the absence of mother?

Evelyne lived through childhood and adolescence raised by nuns in a world of asexual women, perhaps not devoid of the feminine, but certainly without femininity. With long, straight, lacklustre hair, no makeup, clothed in faded shapeless outfits, she appeared timeless, almost ghostlike. When I first met her I had the thought that "she's an outdated model" yet she was barely 36 years old. I learned that she had become a concert pianist at a very young age, gifted with an exceptional talent, only to abandon her career at the age of 20 and then spend her life with a self-centered, ambitious and very materialistic man. She became his secretary and gave him three children.

A feeling of overwhelming emptiness brought her to my office. She had left her partner and had resumed her piano lessons to be able to teach music and provide for her children. I now wonder if this was not also a way to reconnect with an aspect of "The Feminine" having to do with excess and forbidden pleasures, a force that had pushed her beyond fatigue and doubt to claim, to "devour" a piece to perfection. Her teacher, an older foreign concert pianist, was first moved by her talent and then fell in love with her. He was old enough to be her father, but this love, although fairly platonic, brought her back to life. Freed from the intransigence of her first partner who could not bear the time she devoted to their youngest son, she could finally enjoy being an affectionate and loving mother, present and devoted to her young son who was still a baby. Evelyne could now enjoy showering her son with what she never received herself.



Evelyne, the abandoned child, lived in such solitude during her early years that I wonder whether she did not harbour fantasies of self-conception that could have sheltered her from all desire. Were her anxieties sublimated since childhood thanks to an exceptional musical talent? Could practicing piano have an internal association to an erogenous masochism which might paradoxically be an instinctual support?

## **Discussion**

How can we conceptualize originary psychic bisexuality? The way it is currently thought of in varying fields of study at times seems to reduce it to conscious manifestations, to denature and trivialized. Contemporary perspectives seem to have little tolerance for limits and restrictions (only two sexes!) and consider it an infringement of their rights to be assigned to one sex and only one! When an individual loses this singular mark of identity that which is linked with gender identity, could the confusion between masculine and feminine give way to other confusions related to a denial of limits? Are we in the process of doing away with all of the unconscious conflictual ramifications that are associated with sexual identity as well as those having to do with anatomic reality: confusion between self and object, love and hate, desire and reality, primary and secondary processes? I believe it is of primary importance to open a line of inquiry into the nature of all sexual freedoms which, in an unspoken manner may too often continue to be classified as pathology.

A reconsideration of sexual differences on the basis of psychic bisexuality would allow us to think of the man who approaches a woman in a way that is receptive and open with regard to her femininity as a man who may have accepted the feminine potential within himself. As the object of his desire, the woman would thus become a part of his self and in this way he might also allow himself to be used as an object.

The idea of a primary and imperious feminine which combines excitation and fantasy undermines the idea of a body defined by that which it does not have. Conceived in this way, femininity presents itself more as a defense, an attempt to establish order in the archaic feminine drive which is anarchic and thereby threatening.

In his more clinical papers, such as *A Child is Beaten and the Schreber Case* as well as the correspondence with Fleiss, Freud writes that “The essential repressed element is always the feminine element” (letter of 25/05/97, document M). Is this not an identification of the feminine with the repressed unconscious? The boundlessness of Schreber’s femininity and the Wolf Man’s breakdown in the face of a feminine desire to be penetrated by the father are good illustrations of the power of the feminine which will not be subdued by the logic of symbolic language. This power can never be entirely represented: men and women can never have access to the feminine except as an enigma, a mystery, a denial, a force or an upsurge!

We have characterized femininity as a fiction, a trap, the set of characteristics which a woman displays in order to hide what she lacks. In this masquerade, the woman as a whole becomes the phallus she does not have: in this way she can love herself and incite the other to love her entirely.

Without rejecting this hypothesis, I would like to add the possibility that especially for women, the finery, clothing and ornaments signify that the female body deserves to be protected and appreciated in its distinctiveness. I would also dare to add that the mask of femininity may actually disguise the presence of an internal “masculinity” characterized by autonomy, ambition and determination which, if it were more overt, would lead to reprisals or even drive some men away in a society where the primacy of the phallus is less obsolete than we would like to believe.

In closing, I will say that if women are the weaker sex in the cultural world, the privileged relations they have with life, death and sexuality, may well make them the stronger sex in the Unconscious!

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<sup>i</sup> 1. Translator’s note”