

Feminism and Psychoanalysis

A CRITICAL DICTIONARY



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Editorial Note

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Lacan bibliographical entries: Wherever possible translations are cited. In the case of British and American editions of the same work the page numbers correspond.

Throughout the dictionary the convention '1987 [1977]' indicates an earlier edition in the original language.

Cross-references to other entries are given in SMALL CAPITALS; the index may be used to facilitate further reference. Each entry has its own bibliography, the authors of all items of which are listed in the index.

Introduction

This is not a dictionary in a conventional sense, for it does not merely define terms, but explores, historizes and politicizes them; nor does it pretend to present them objectively, but rather places them in the context of a dialogue between two discourses. Its purpose is not only to conceptualize the field of feminist psychoanalytic practice but to generate critical inter-implications between feminism and psychoanalysis. Between these two fields there is a space for transformations.

Of what, then, does this dictionary consist if it is not a lexicon? Entries are listed in the form of an alphabetized compilation of concepts and themes, applications and disciplines, theorists and practitioners. Most of the entries deal with major psychoanalytical concepts that appear repeatedly in contemporary feminist studies, sometimes extensively borrowed from psychoanalysis and sometimes merely alluding to it. The explication of these concepts in the dictionary necessarily involves a short history of psychoanalytic usage, the feminist adaptation of that usage, and the consequences of introducing re-utilized concepts into psychoanalytic theory and practice (e.g. CASTRATION COMPLEX; PERVERSION; PRE-OEDIPAL). Conversely, we have chosen some feminist concepts that could be imported into psychoanalysis for re-utilization (e.g. GENDER; RADICAL LESBIANISM; WOMAN-IDENTIFIED WOMAN). There is a greater number of psychoanalytic than feminist concepts, since it is feminism that is re-explicating psychoanalysis rather than vice versa. Feminism is making a political move in appropriating psychoanalysis for its project, as well as pushing psychoanalysis to its theoretical and clinical limits.

We do not want to give the impression that this inter-implication occurs only at the conceptual level, for we are aware that there are established applications and disciplines where feminism and psychoanalysis converge and re-constitute themselves both theoretically (e.g. ART; LITERATURE; LITERARY AND TEXTUAL CRITICISM) and practically (e.g. CLINICAL PERSPECTIVES; MICHIGAN PSYCHOANALYTIC COUNCIL; WOMEN'S THERAPY CENTRE). Among significant names we take theorists and practitioners in psychoanalysis who initiated the engagement with feminism, as well as

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ones who are continuing to re-appropriate psychoanalysis for feminism. On the other hand, feminist theorists who are not analysts but who use psychoanalysis are not listed by name but have been absorbed into the entries on practices and disciplines: it would have been difficult to distinguish among the large number of feminists who extrapolate creatively a *bricolage* of applications from psychoanalytic theory.

There is a reason for giving feminism priority in the title. Most of the entries are written by feminists or by other writers participating in the debate between the two fields, the emphasis being on an extended field of feminism rather than merely on the genesis of a feminist psychoanalysis. Thus there are inevitably a number of entries where psychoanalysis is peripheral, often because it has not been regarded as sufficiently relevant to the discourse (see ANTHROPOLOGY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS; MATERIALIST FEMINIST CRITICISM; RACE/IMPERIALISM; SCIENCE).

In terms of procedure the editors have solicited entries from international scholars currently working in the two fields. These contributors have documented not only the history of a concept and other interrelated concepts, but also the debate and controversy surrounding it, its political importance for feminism, and the theorists and practitioners who have coined or used it.

The dictionary has been planned to extend in three directions in order that the impact of psychoanalysis on feminism may be adequately assessed.

First, there is a distinct historical dimension. Wherever possible, entries include a concept's history, the debates and controversies surrounding the concept, and its political importance. The emphasis is on providing a record of continuing theoretical explorations that tends towards conceptual mobility rather than fixity. Hence the evolution of a concept is more important for its contribution to the two fields than for any inherent historical interest. The historical dimension also comes into force for the entries on those psychoanalysts after Freud who have passed into history and whose theories engaged and are still engaging feminists (e.g., ANNA FREUD, DEUTSCH, HORNEY, JONES, JUNG, KLEIN, LACAN).

The history of the women's movement has gone through a number of phases or 'waves'. Some entries (e.g. FEMINIST HISTORY; FEMINISM BEFORE PSYCHOANALYSIS), sketch out the movement's earliest moments. Although feminism has grappled with a concept of sexuality and desire from Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) onwards, critical dialogue between feminism and psychoanalysis begins with Simone de Beauvoir's *La deuxième sexe* (1949) and continues after an interval with Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Each protests that in psychoanalytic discourse woman is defined as inferior

and only with reference to man. This phase is followed by a second, which intensifies the protest against the social stereotyping of women within patriarchy and produces classic feminist positions such as those of Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970), Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970), and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970). All these continued to signal rebellion against difference as inequality, seeing femininity as socially constructed and calling for radical changes in society which would eliminate sexual difference. Juliet Mitchell's critique in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974) forcefully intersected with this second phase, challenging these assumptions with a sustained and closely argued case for psychoanalysis as a theory able to explain the process whereby women and men came to internalize an oppressive ideology. Psychoanalysis could not be held responsible for this process; on the contrary, it could have the political effect of raising consciousness and instigating social change. Out of this focus of women on themselves as a collective consciousness emerged a third phase which changed the terms of the debate after the mid-1970s: now women's difference from men was no longer seen as a disadvantage, but as a source of pride and occasion for confidence. Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976) theorized and lyricized lesbianism as a radical movement, opposed to the compulsory heterosexuality of patriarchal society. An alternative model of female identity was proposed by a New York group calling itself 'Radicalesbians', which tried to get away from the idea of lesbianism as an exclusively sexual identity. These separatist approaches may be contrasted with some of the French feminist theories discussed below, which never quite abandon the feminine position; in articulating the position as psychic rather than social, they leave space for the subversion of binary divisions (see FEMINISM OF DIFFERENCE).

The second dimension of the dictionary is the psychoanalytical, centring on Freud and Lacan, beginning with Freud's 'discovery' of the unconscious in the course of his researches into the bodily symptoms of hysteria. His several attempts to construct a narrative adequate to female sexuality all end up with the same bleak theme: the girl is a little man until the castration complex. She starts out by desiring her mother as actively as does the boy, but while in the throes of the oedipus complex she sees that she 'lacks' a penis. The girl turns away from her equally lacking mother in the direction of her father, in the ultimate hope that a child from him will fill the lack. In this scenario both boy and girl are subject to castration, give up the parent of the opposite sex and identify with the sex that matches their biology. Early feminists objected to the notion of femininity as an inferior version, a 'second sex' (de Beauvoir).

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But Freud has been used by other feminists who, in the wake of Mitchell, continue to assert, to a world that still largely finds it inconceivable, that gender is psychically constructed, not biologically given: both boy and girl are bisexual until the vicissitudes of the oedipus and castration complex. This further points to the fragility of the gender definition, always slipping and never finally secure for either sex (*see* BIOLOGY; BISEXUALITY; SEXUAL DIFFERENCE).

Feminist psychoanalysis, however, evolved into two conflicting narratives, two re-readings, one made by OBJECT-RELATIONS THEORY in Britain and North America, the other by Lacanian theory in France. British and North American feminists would like to challenge patriarchal power within the social structure and change family and labour relations; French feminists want to challenge patriarchal power as it functions on a symbolic level and clear a space for women in discourse.

Object-relations theory concentrates on the pre-oedipal relation between mother and child as a moment before the realization of the father's place in the social order disrupts the symbiotic relation between mother and child. In Britain and America this has led to a normative emphasis on motherhood, with the mother's subjectivity seen as secondary to that of the child. Among feminists in America there has at least been an attempt to foreground the mother as an independent social being with desires of her own (*see* CHODOROW). In both countries the attempt to focus upon the mother/child relation has tended to ignore the question of sexual difference: whereas in Britain the emphasis seems to be on the relation between a mother and a sexually undifferentiated child, in America Chodorow's revision of this state of affairs places the gender role of the child in the foreground of the debate (boys are treated differently from girls from a very early age), but the actual acquisition of gender is seen as unproblematic.

In France the pre-oedipal relation is likewise at the centre of feminist psychoanalysis, but there it has led to a more subversive account of gender acquisition. Curiously enough, this was only achieved by both ambivalently accepting and rigorously opposing the revisionary reading of Freud made by Lacan. Whereas the ego in object-relations theory was regarded as rudimentarily present from the beginning and grew in strength via the interaction with a 'good enough mother' (Winnicott's term), for Lacan the subject constitutes itself via an illusory mirror image of wholeness, which remains a fiction throughout life. The mirror stage inaugurates the subject's alienation, an Imaginary moment which already borders on the Symbolic through the mother's desire, structured as it is by the Father's law and language. Though the child tries to identify with the mother's desire, the Father as the figure of law (unlike Freud's natural father) insists that the child take its place in the order of

language as 'he' or 'she'. The possessing or not possessing of the phallus (not the biological organ) determines the way both sexes assume their lack: both have to give up being the phallus for the mother (*see* PHALLUS: DEFINITIONS). According to this theory, then, castration is a symbolic event suffered by both sexes, irrespective of their biological sex.

While some feminists accept Lacan's 'phallogocentrism', arguing that he develops Freud's non-biologist thinking to its logical conclusion by showing how men and women are constructed in a patriarchal system, others take the argument further by maintaining that Lacan does not merely lay down the phallic law, but reveals the frailty of psychic identity and the mobility of desire, both of which point to the fictionality of gender definitions (*see* IMAGINARY; PHALLOGOCENTRISM; PHALLUS: FEMINIST IMPLICATIONS). This particularly applies when it is a question of the existence of Woman, who according to Lacan is nothing but an effect of phallic fantasy. The woman is under erasure, because she represents lack within the phallogocentric order of language. Of her essence she is 'not all': there is no positive term for her in the Symbolic. Precisely because of this, however, she has access to something that goes beyond the phallic economy. It is because Woman is not adequately defined within the patriarchal order that Real effects make themselves felt in relation to her (*see* JOUISSANCE; REAL; SYMPTOM).

Many French and French-inspired feminists vigorously object to this marginalizing of the feminine. In a variety of ways they have attempted to read Freud and Lacan so as either to turn marginality into an advantage or to re-conceptualize the feminine. In either case they have, like the object-relations theorists, returned to the pre-oedipal relation between child and mother, more especially between daughter and mother; but, unlike the object-relations theorists, they have constructed a less repressive narrative of the relation of the infant to the mother's body, though the various positions they adopt do owe something to the way they have read, or re-read, Klein and Winnicott. Kristeva associates psychic repression with the actual structures of language and sees the pre-oedipal as a play of bodily rhythms and pre-linguistic exchanges between infant and mother. Her displacement of the Lacanian Imaginary by the semiotic, a pre-symbolic process of resistance producing effects throughout life (and thus not confined to the pre-oedipal moment), has been hailed by feminists who are looking for a way of undermining patriarchy without subscribing to a feminine essence. But despite the considerable following she has acquired, there is also a feeling that she is at a distance from feminism because of her refusal of the category of woman (*see* KRISTEVA). A number of French theorists and/or analysts have gone in a different direction altogether. Cixous, for instance, tries to ground a new, specifically feminine language and

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feminine writing in the child's – and woman's – pleasurable relation to the mother's body, a pleasure denied to them by the fathers of psychoanalysis. She has developed a particular practice of writing in order to launch a critique of phallogentric language and to render specific the materiality of women's sexuality, which she sees as a source of fluidity, multiple productivity and diffuse energy (*see* ÉCRITURE FÉMININE; FEMININE ECONOMY). Like Cixous, Irigaray wants to clear a space for women within the Symbolic which allows for a subjectivity that is not defined by the patriarchal order. Her concept of a Symbolic Mother and her stress on the necessity for a maternal genealogy are a direct challenge to the hegemony of Lacan's Phallus (*see* IRIGARAY; MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP; PATRIARCHY).

Many feminists hold the view that, while psychoanalysis may have enabled women to understand how they internalize 'femininity' in a patriarchal society, it has not given them any clues as to how to liberate themselves from its oppressiveness, in that it does not suggest any forms of political struggle. Others argue that psychoanalysis does not need politicizing because its central discovery, the unconscious, returns the subjective element to politics: the unconscious reveals the precariousness of identity and therefore psychoanalysis is already of political use to feminism. This suggests, then, that the political dimension of psychoanalysis is implied in the challenge to supposed objectivities (*see* REPRESENTATION). The dilemma for feminists is that so far there has been no way of reconciling the notion of the feminine as a general problem for both sexes (a challenge to binary divisions) with the historical need for women to find a collective voice in an oppressive phallogentric reality.

The third, political, dimension focuses on the possible re-utilization of psychoanalytic theory and practice so as to facilitate social change. If we have to accept that the unconscious is not merely the effect of the repressive social world, if we have to live with the notion of subjectivity as caught up in fantasy and the compulsion to repeat, how do we reconcile these factors with the legitimacy of political protest? The only way forward seems to be to face up to the fact that, even if there is a structuring psychical process, a collective illusion of totalization and fixity which cannot be reduced either to biology or to social history, it is nevertheless not beyond emancipatory revision. Even if we always have to refer to the Other, the pre-existent law of language and social order, the form of our reference can be modified and a different way of producing the social bond could result (*see* UNCONSCIOUS). That is to say, the text (whether the subject as text, the literary text or the text of history) is constituted by certain relations which depend on how certain places are occupied: a politicized cultural practice will show how knowledge is produced by a reader him/herself, determined by whoever is in the place

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of power (*see* LITERARY AND TEXTUAL CRITICISM; READING AS/LIKE A WOMAN). This makes cultural practice an essential field of struggle in exploring the relation between the psychic and the social. The psyche resists its total social determination via the subject's relation to fantasy, that excess of desire which gives a subject the capacity to confer meaning, to intervene in the world and make a difference. What disrupts the Symbolic is precisely the force of desire and fantasy, variable though it be according to the contingencies of the social-historical. Psychoanalysis provides a theory of how fantasies originate and how they are projected out (*see* FANTASY; PSYCHICAL REALITY; UNCANNY). If psychoanalysis can help to identify certain insistent transgenerational primal fantasies, the collusion of culture with these fantasies might be more easily exposed. The concerted opposition of women to being relegated to the twin poles of idealization and denigration is an obvious example of refusing powerful patriarchal fantasies. Feminism is therefore right to see the personal as the political (*see* PERSONAL/AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CRITICISM). The question, then, is what forms of deconstructive practice would be most conducive to revealing the psychic disempowering of women via concrete social relations (*see* MATERIALIST FEMINIST CRITICISM; M/F; PATRIARCHY).

This dictionary therefore spells out a cultural politics through a living dialogue between theory and practice, feminist theorists and psychoanalytic theorists, feminists and feminists. It is a cultural politics which widens the scope of sexual politics by covering a range of aesthetic and literary studies and which clarifies new developments in cultural feminism and psychoanalysis (e.g. ART; FEMINIST CINEMA; LITERATURE; REPRESENTATION). It accounts for the diverse ways in which feminists have taken up the struggle over the production, distribution and transformation of meaning in a number of specific cultural practices in order to challenge the forms of representation which constrain and oppress them. Moreover, the dictionary is topically responsive to fields that have been marginalized (POSTMODERNISM; RACE/IMPERIALISM; feminist PHILOSOPHY; feminist SCIENCE), thus extending the concept of culture rather than incorporating the margins into what classical psychoanalysis takes 'culture' or 'civilization' to be.

Hence this dictionary is not only a device for learning, but is also an experiment in cartography, mapping conceptual and political intersections in order to extend a vital and critical engagement. We hope that it will be looked upon as an intervention in its own right, enabling those who consult it to take a panoramic view of struggles past, present and future, and to see a range of strategies in action, where part of the fascination is in seeing where there is alliance, where there is conflict, and where these two might yet lead.

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