

TRIBUTE TO THE OLDER WOMAN

Psychoanalysis, feminism, and ageism

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I begin with a scene drawn out of memory from my childhood, remembered as I was reading psychoanalysis and feminism in preparation to write this essay about aging. I like to think that this memory of a long afternoon surfaced in response to thought and theory, and that in its way it corroborates the affective tone and theoretical trajectory my words take in the following pages.

I was 10 and on vacation with my father's parents. My grandfather stayed behind (he always did) while my grandmother and I went down to the beach. It was too cold to swim, it was our first day, and so we walked along the water's edge to the rocks at the far end of the shore. I remember climbing those rocks for hours. What we had forgotten, of course, was the deceptive coolness of the sun. We returned to the hotel, our skin painfully, desperately burned. We could put nothing against our bodies. Not a single sheet. We lay still and naked on the twin beds, complaining, laughing, talking. Two twinned, different, sunburned bodies – the body of a 10-year old girl and the body of a 62-year-old woman.

To my mind's retrospective eye it is crucial that this scene is not a story of the mother and the daughter, a story whose psychoanalytic plot revolves around identification and separation, intimacy and distance, and engages what I call the strong emotions of psychoanalysis (whether in the writing of Freud, Klein, or Lacan); I am thinking of the potentially explosive emotions of envy, fear, hostility, desire, guilt, and jealousy. Instead it is a story of an older woman (surely a missing person in psychoanalysis) and a young girl who are separated by some fifty years. Yet I do not want to say that the two of them are *divided* by generations. Rather, they are somehow *connected* by them. What would I say of the affect associated with this memory? I will return to this question, but first I want to take a brief detour to insist on the subject of affect.

In *Le Discours Vivant* (1973), an excellent if unfortunately little known

book on the emotions and psychoanalysis, André Green shows how Freud moved from an emphasis on the role of *representation* in psychic life in his earlier work (notably in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900)) to an emphasis on *affect* itself in his later work ('Mourning and melancholia' (1917) and *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926) are two prime examples). This shift in emphasis parallels Freud's concern with castration and the figure of the father in his earlier work and with separation anxiety and the figure of the mother in his later work. The later work of Freud prefigures object relations theory and attachment theory, which inform my thinking here. In particular I welcome the later Freud's explicit analysis of the emotions, which all too often are implicitly associated with the feminine and thus denigrated.¹

I turn first to a short text by Freud written late in his life, which does privilege the analysis of affect but which none the less returns us to the figure of the father and Oedipal anxiety. When he was 80 years old Freud mulled over the complex of negative feelings associated with a vacation he had taken to Greece with his brother a little over thirty years before (a coincidence of seaside vacations that has only now occurred to me). I am referring to his letter to Romain Rolland, published under the title of 'A disturbance of memory on the Acropolis' (1936). Freud tells us that what prompted him to write this text was the recurrence in recent years of a similar 'disturbance of memory' and, we are given to assume, a disturbance of similar feelings. These he describes as depression and gloom, as discontent and irresolution, as in short – and in a wonderful if morose phrase – 'the expression of a pessimism' (1953–74: 22: 242). What does it mean for feelings to cause a disturbance? I take it Freud means that they interrupted a false composure, or broke an illusion of peace, or interfered with a *mood* (I will come back to this in a moment). In the final analysis Freud attributes these disturbing feelings to filial guilt. An ambitious man, he concluded he had gone further than had his father (both literally in terms of travel some thirty years before and symbolically in terms of intellectual accomplishment over his long life) and that he was to be punished for it. His feelings of foreboding, his 'pessimism', are *themselves* that punishment, exacted by the superego. I have commented elsewhere on the place of this text in the context of Freud's work and the discontents of the aging body (Woodward, 1991). Here I want only to remark that in 'Disturbance of memory' we find ourselves thick in the Freudian world of two generations with the 80-year-old son still bound tragically after all these years to his long dead father by the cord of the Oedipus complex, with its dynamic of desire and prohibition, guilt and punishment. Thus this version of the Oedipus drama is not played out between two people but in the solitary *mise-en-scène* of the psyche.

What interests me also in Freud's 'Disturbance of memory' is the

notion of the repetition not of an event but of a complex of emotions, particular emotions that Freud took as his task to analyse and that had long been central to the structuring narrative of the Oedipus complex. And yet earlier Freud had remarked that 'every affect . . . is only a reminiscence of an event' (1909, quoted in 1953-74: 20: 84). I take him here in his materialist sense. But actually I would insist that it is never the event itself that is ultimately important to us – it is the emotion (or complex of emotions) associated with it. Moreover, in the case of Freud's disturbance of affect, his feelings of foreboding are not in fact a reminiscence of an event but rather an *expectation* of one, foreboding that arises out of fantasy, the specifically Freudian fear of castration or punishment.

How would I understand the complex of emotions associated with my childhood memory of my grandmother and myself at the beach, of our two sunburned bodies? Not as a disturbance in Freud's sense, not as a foreboding 'expression of a pessimism', but as an expression of reassurance. Yet not as *jouissance*, as an expression of woman's libidinal economy, which Hélène Cixous has described in 'Sorties' this way:

Unleashed and raging, she belongs to the race of the waves. She arises, she approaches, she lifts up, she reaches, covers over, washes ashore, flows embracing the cliff's least undulation, already she is another, arising again, throwing the fringed vastness of her body up high, follows herself, and covers over.

(1981: 91)

I break off here, unwilling to follow Cixous's fluvial prose any longer along this sinuous beach into its realm of intoxication, vertigo, mystery, and effervescence. Instead, I understand the affect associated with my memory of a seaside scene, which is drawn from everyday life, as nothing more perhaps but certainly nothing less than a palpable *sociality*, a convivial ease. My affective memory (Stanisłaski), now over thirty-five years old, is a reminiscence of an event, not a fantasy that takes place in the private *mise-en-scène* of the psyche (Freud), not a textual feminist Utopia of rhapsodic proportions (Cixous).

John Bowlby (1973) would describe this scene in terms of attachment, Jessica Benjamin (1988) in terms of emotional attunement. Indeed, for me the emotional precipitate that is the reminiscence of this event I understand to be based on what Benjamin calls mutual recognition.² But we lack a variegated and rich theoretical vocabulary to describe such emotions. Given the discourse of psychoanalysis with its attention to the 'stormy passions', as Freud has put it (1953-74: 11: 75),³ we should not be at all surprised by this: psychoanalysis has devoted little attention to the elaboration of what for want of a better term we might call the positive emotions (we certainly *do* need a better word than this)

or what I have elsewhere called the 'quiet' emotions (Woodward 1990-91) and Sartre the 'subtle' emotions (1948: 22). Furthermore, within the classical parameters of psychoanalysis, it might be more accurate to refer to what I have described as a *mood*.

Here I want to draw on the excellent distinction made by Lawrence Grossberg between desire and mood, or more precisely, between what he identifies as libidinal economies of desire and affective economies of mood. The two economies represent different ways of organizing psychic energy, which Grossberg describes in the following way:

If desire is always focused (as the notion of cathexis suggests), mood is always dispersed. While both may be experienced in terms of needs, only libidinal needs can be, however incompletely, satisfied. Moods are never satisfied, only realized. If desire assumes an economy of depth (e.g., the notion of repression), mood is always on the surface (which is not to be equated with consciousness). It is the coloration or passion within which one's investments in, and commitments to the world are possible.

(Grossberg, 1988: 285)⁴

Desire is focused on an object and is goal-oriented; mood arises out of a situation and gives to it a certain tone.

Significantly, Grossberg implicitly (although not exclusively) associates an affective economy of mood with a psychoanalysis of object relations; this is how he can understand the affective economy of mood to yield the possibility of difference. Affective needs, he writes, are 'never satisfied by particular relationships but only by a more general attitude or mood within which any particular relationship has its effects' (ibid.). Grossberg's theorization of the affective economy of mood (in its 'positive' manifestation) resonates with Benjamin's theorization of emotional attunement in an intersubjective space. How would I describe, then, the mood of my memory of that summer afternoon some thirty-five years ago? It was one of fluent companionship that, importantly for what I turn to now, stretched across the continuity established by three generations.

Psychoanalysis is a discourse obsessed with the making of triangles out of the elements of two generations. Its developmental politics is twofold. First, the constitution of male and female sexuality is understood to be achieved simultaneously with the rigid separation of generations, and second, both the sexes and the generations are ever after to remain unequal in power. This geometry of the nuclear family is established only through force, which enlists the emotions of fear and anxiety. Thus classically the father (or the Name of the Father) is cast as the third term that intervenes in the mother-child dyad.

How might we rethink this triangulation? In 'Places names' and

'Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini', Julia Kristeva introduces into the equation another term altogether: the mother's mother. As we shall see in a moment, however, for Kristeva it is not the mother's mother who is the third term. In the event of giving birth, Kristeva writes, a woman 'replays in reverse the encounter with her own mother' (1980b: 279), she 'enters into contact with her own mother' (1980a: 239).⁵ Kristeva reads this alternative triangle as mother-mother-child, with the child serving as third term, as a kind of go-between who brings a woman into psychic continuity with mother. The woman, her mother: the two are, Kristeva writes in 'Motherhood', 'the same continuity differentiating itself' (ibid.). Kristeva is, however, ambivalent about this identification – and well she should be, given the mystical aura with which she endows it. Thus she also presents the child as the third term, which also breaks this imaginary and revelatory bond between the woman and her mother. As she puts it brilliantly in 'Place names', the child is also an *analyser* (ibid.: 279), who releases the woman, now a mother, from what Kristeva provocatively calls 'the homosexual facet of motherhood' (1980a: 239), and more clinically, 'the daughter-mother symbiosis' and 'the undifferentiated community of women' (1980b: 279).

I must leave behind many complexities here, but before I do I want to insist on three fundamental features of Kristeva's rewriting of this basic figure of psychoanalytic geometry. It is at the very least two-thirds female. It touches three generations. And the child plays an active if contradictory role.

Who is this child and what is the child playing with? By asking *who* I mean of course to introduce the question of gender. In his lecture on 'Femininity' (1933), Freud rehearses the process by which a woman 'comes into being . . . out of a child with a bisexual disposition' (1953–74: 22: 116). That is, he theorizes the constitution of a specifically female sexual identity where before, he assumes, there was none. In this late text Freud admits that the pre-Oedipal attachment of the little girl to the mother is much more powerful and richer than he had before believed. He comes to this conclusion in part by calling attention to the little girl's practice of playing with dolls. How does he explain her play? It can't be an expression of her 'femininity', for that has not yet been established. So he finds himself forced to conclude that it is an expression of her 'identification with her mother', with the phallic mother (she is 'phallic' because the little girl does not yet recognize her mother as 'castrated'). It is, in Freud's eyes, an 'affectionate' attachment, although he expresses it in ambiguous terms: the little girl 'was playing the part of her mother and the doll was herself: now she could do with the baby everything that her mother used to do with her' (1953–74: 22: 128). In the opening pages of his essay Freud cautions

his readers not to think of masculinity and femininity – the polarity that dominates sexual life, as he puts it – in terms of activity and passivity. But in fact he can find no other way of describing (or theorizing) the little girl's behaviour: the little girl, identifying with her mother, substitutes 'activity for passivity' (ibid.). Notwithstanding many of Freud's disclaimers, then, the conventional connotations of sexual difference cling to the words 'active' and 'passive' like a phallic slip, reinscribing themselves retrospectively in the pre-Oedipal period. Similarly, by describing the pre-Oedipal mother as 'phallic', Freud continues to read the scene of a little girl's play in terms of a *sexual economy*.⁶ Indeed, Freudian psychoanalysis can admit no other economy than a sexual economy. Just as importantly for my purposes, Freud can only imagine two generations in this scene: the mother and the child.

I want to read this scene differently: for the child, the doll represents not her self (as Freud would have it), nor the Other, but simply and profoundly, an other, a baby. This baby, however, is not a sibling, that is to say, a member of the same generation (in such a case we might predict jealousy of a conventional triangular sort).⁷ Rather this 'baby' belongs to the next generation. She is a child to whom the little girl transfers, as Luce Irigaray has put it, 'quasi-maternal affects' (1989: 132).⁸ We thus have a model of three generations, similar to but different from that sketched by Kristeva, where the third term, the child, does not separate the mother from the child but is added to the two of them (in fact, we again find several mothers here). We have, in other words, not a *triangle* but the further elaboration of a *line*, a plumb line – one that has specific gravity and weight to it. Furthermore, it is not sexual difference that distinguishes this economy, but generational linkage, or generational continuity.

In 'Femininity' Freud is concerned with sexuality and its structuring binary of masculinity and femininity. Within this framework he was bound to conclude the following: 'When you meet a human being, the first distinction you make is "male or female?"' (1953–74: 22: 113). Sexuality is the content, we can say, of Freudian psychoanalysis,⁹ which is itself an instance of the seemingly endless production of the discourse of sexuality in western culture, a phenomenon to which Foucault has so persuasively drawn attention (1980). Thus Freud insists that sexual difference (although he does not use this term) is the most distinctive feature of a person. But we are not obliged to agree. What of race, for example? And what of the category of age? For indeed, when we meet someone, one of the first distinctions we make, as self-consciously or subliminally as distinctions of sexual or racial difference, is that of *age*, and more generally, of generation.

Lending support to my hypothetical model of generational continuity

is the fascinating research of Ernest A. Abelin (1980) on pre-Oedipal triangulation during the *rapprochement* subphase (identified by Margaret Mahler as occurring at around 18 months). Abelin finds not one triangle but two. Both triangles are gender specific – one is for little girls, one for little boys. Significantly, however, only one of them is based on *sexual difference*. The triangle for the little boy is familiarly Freudian to us: it consists of father, mother, and self, and establishes gender identity for the little boy based on his perception of sexual difference. For the little girl, by contrast, the triangle is composed of mother, self, and baby, and establishes gender identity based on her perception of *generational continuity*. Abelin explains the difference between the two triangles this way:

Generational identity establishes the self 'between' two objects, along one linear dimension. 'I am smaller than mother, but bigger than baby,' or, rather, in terms of wishes: 'I wish to be taken care of by mother and I wish to take care of baby.' By contrast, gender identity classifies the self in relation to the dichotomy male/female.

(Abelin, 1980: 158)¹⁰

For the little girl, then, core gender identity is not based on sexual difference but on generational linkage.

Abelin's research provides a critical vantage point from which we can see again just how saturated classical psychoanalysis is with the discourse of sexuality and sexual difference. The provocative conclusion of his research is that there is another gender-specific content to identity – that of generation – which has not been elaborated by psychoanalysis. Why? In part because in Freud's male hands the two founding figures of psychoanalysis – the hysterical Dora and the felonious Oedipus – present an impediment, if not a dead end, to thinking a third generation. The children of Oedipus were born out of incest and thus outside the law (and we know what happened to them). And the generational economy of the hysteric cannot count to three: the sterile hysteric will produce no children.¹¹

But Abelin's geometry is complicit with Freudian analysis and is faulty. Where he sees a pre-Oedipal *triangle* for little girls based on generational identity, he should instead see a line. As Abelin himself says, generational identity is established along a 'linear' axis.

I have up to now used the word 'identity' without being precise about exactly what I mean by it. 'Identity' is often used in the sense of 'wholeness', and I do not wish it to carry that meaning here. 'Identity' is also often opposed to 'difference', and I do not want it to be construed in this sense either. Recent debates have placed a terrible strain on the notions of 'identity' and 'difference'. It will suffice, I hope,

to say that in the context of this essay 'identity' does not preclude difference. Generational identity entails a difference based on *similarity* that finds its temporal expression in *continuity*.

To summarize, we have, then, this theoretical scene: a mother whose little girl, playing, invents the younger generation. The child is the third term, a term which signifies continuity and not intervention. The tragic binary of Freudian psychoanalysis of two generations can be written in this way.

But in doing so I find that I have reproduced the paradigm of the mother and the infant daughter, and I contend that we have had enough in recent feminist psychoanalytic criticism and theory of this very couple. A child, in my judgement, should not be asked to bear so much meaning. It would be appropriate, however, to ask an older woman to do so. Thus I propose we look at this plumb line, or lineage, from a different point of view, from the perspective of the older woman. Kaja Silverman has insisted that for the choric fantasy of women's unity to function effectively it must point forward as well as backward (1988: 153).¹² Turning our attention to the figure of the other woman, the older woman, as the third term is precisely one way of moving forward, of thinking prospectively rather than retrospectively (although it will involve this also). And to up the ante, I suggest that we imagine her as a figure of knowledge who represents the difference that history, or time, makes, a difference that she in fact literally embodies.

I have already remarked that the older woman is a missing person in Freudian psychoanalysis. The cultural historian Lois Banner has concluded that if Freud had difficulty in general in dealing with women in his writing, he had particular difficulty with aging women (1992). It is therefore not surprising to me that in the one place, to my knowledge, where Freud does discuss a cultural representation of three generations, only two generations are in effect present. The older woman is absent; she has been painted over. I am referring to Freud's analysis of Leonardo da Vinci's painting of St Anne with her daughter Mary and the baby Jesus (1910). Freud comments upon this painting in his study of Leonardo, which focuses on one of Leonardo's memories from childhood (naturally Freud interprets it in sexual terms) (1953-74: 11: 57-137).¹³ Startlingly, Leonardo, with whom Freud clearly identifies, has painted the older woman (the grandmother) as a member of the same generation as her daughter. St Anne is described by Freud as 'a young woman of unfaded beauty', indeed 'a woman of radiant beauty' (ibid.: 113). Why are there two mothers of the same generation for the Christ child instead of one? Why is the older woman not represented as such? Why is her older body reconstructed in the masquerade of youth?

Freud offers the following analysis based on the peculiarities of

Leonardo's birth and upbringing. The illegitimate Leonardo was raised exclusively by his birth mother until he was 5 and thereafter by his stepmother in his father's home. Thus Leonardo, so strongly attached to mother figures (and not to the father, who was missing from his first five years), has, in Freud's words, 'given the boy' – that is, himself – 'two mothers' (ibid.). But I would argue that Freud's own fascination with this painting tells us more than this: Freudian psychoanalysis could only figure a child's relation to a woman positively in terms of the paradigm of the younger mother and infant. The relationship portrayed in this scene – it is a doubled-over pieta – is maternally idyllic. The celebrated Leonardo smile is the familiar, almost banal 'blissful smile of the joy of motherhood' (ibid.). The affect here is Freudian Utopian sublime, one that can only be associated with the pieta of the young mother and infant in the 'prehistory' of man.

Although Freud asserts that he dismissed the notion, held by some of Leonardo's biographers, that Leonardo 'could not bring himself to paint old age, lines and wrinkles' (ibid.), Freud relegates St Anne – an older woman but not necessarily *old* – to the outcast territory of old age. In Freudian psychoanalysis a woman beyond child-bearing age is old, dysfunctional in sexual (reproductive) terms, a dysfunction which is written on her body in folds and wrinkles for everyone to see. Such a woman, we might say, cannot even be represented within the discourse of classical psychoanalysis. Within the parameters of psychoanalysis we can imagine a point when increasing age (it is ticking away) intersects with female sexuality at the biological time bomb of menopause – when female sexuality vanishes, leaving only gender behind. The dilemma, however, is this: Freudian psychoanalysis cannot contain the concept of gender as distinct from sexuality. Thus: the older woman cannot exist! If in Freudian terms a female child prior to the Oedipus complex is consigned to a *prehistorical* state, a postmenopausal woman, an older woman, is dismissed from the world as *posthistorical*, finding herself outside of the discourse of history yet again.

In old age women are subject to a double marginality at the very least, one that feminist critiques of psychoanalysis can help explain. To summarize: first, the male fear of woman as the all-engulfing mother is exacerbated when women grow old; moreover, in psychoanalysis the attraction to the mother is understood as taboo, and the older woman necessarily occupies the position of the mother or, worse, the grandmother. Thus the connection between sexuality and identity needs to be thought through in terms of the place of the postmenopausal woman in psychoanalysis. Simone de Beauvoir (1970) offers this analysis, which may itself be symptomatic of gerontophobia:

as men see it, a woman's purpose in life is to be an erotic object,

when she grows old and ugly she loses the place allotted to her in society: she becomes a *monstrum* that excites revulsion and even dread.

(Beauvoir, 1978: 184)

Second, and perhaps most importantly, the consequences of the dread of aging for feminism itself need to be addressed. For feminism itself has been profoundly ageist.

In feminist criticism and psychoanalysis the older woman – the woman of the third generation (and she – or we – may be older than this) – has not found a place.¹⁴ In much recent feminist psychoanalytic criticism in the United States a woman is implicitly theorized or represented as a mother to young children.¹⁵ To be sure she may appear in the guise of a woman juggling work of her own with the demands and pleasures of motherhood, but at her oldest she tends to be cast as on the young side of middle age (I think here of the surprised, almost shocked tone with which I have heard some of my only slightly younger colleagues refer to an older woman as – of all the impossible things! – a *grandmother*). Or if age is explicitly analysed, what we find is the Freudian plot of a struggle for power between two close but emotionally distant ‘generations’: the mother and the daughter have gotten older but they don’t seem to have learned much – or they have learned too well how to jockey for power. Thus literary critic Marianne Hirsch, writing candidly in her book *The Mother/Daughter Plot* (1989) of her experience as a fellow at the Bunting Institute, notes the

painful set of divisions which emerged between the discourse of mothers and that of daughters; the sympathy we could muster for ourselves and each other *as mothers*, we could not quite transfer to our own mothers. This inability, this tragic asymmetry between our own two voices, was so pervasive as to be extremely difficult to discuss. It revealed the depth and the extent of the ‘matrophobia’ that exists not only in the culture at large but also within feminism, and within women who are mothers.

(Hirsch, 1989: 26)

And thus, Alice Jardine in a recent essay (1989) describes the relationship between the two successive post-1968 groups of feminists in the American academy as thoroughly Oedipal. She does not want, she says, to ‘succumb’ to this paradigm, but in fact she does – and for good reasons: the Oedipal paradigm does describe accurately the struggle between two adjacent generations, a struggle that I suspect we have all witnessed and in which we have all probably consciously or unconsciously played at least one part and possibly two. As Jardine expresses it:

I would like to avoid the mother/daughter paradigm here (so as not to succumb simply to miming the traditional father/son, master/disciple model), but it is difficult to avoid being positioned by the institution as mothers and daughters. Structures of debt/gift (mothers and increasingly daughters control a lot of money and prestige in the university), structures of our new institutional power over each other, desires and demands for recognition and love – all of these are falling into place in rather familiar Freudian ways.

(Jardine, 1989: 77)

Yes, I agree. But I would argue that it is not just the patriarchal structure of the institution that places us in Oedipal struggle but also our way of analysing that relation between generations, limited as it is to two. For it is unmistakably clear that there are more than two generations of women in the academy.

Thus, one of the ways to construct a 'theoretical genealogy' of women¹⁶ is to stretch our attention to include another generation. We must do so not in order to figure a new notion of a *horizontal* relation between women, such as Irigaray advises – indeed that is part of the problem. As the activist lesbian Barbara MacDonald has argued in *Look Me in the Eye: Old Women, Aging and Ageism* (1983), the emphasis on sisterhood in the women's movement reinforces and produces mistrust and divisions between younger and older women; 'youth is bonded with patriarchy in the enslavement of the older woman. There would, in fact, be no youth culture without the powerless older woman' (ibid.: 39). Instead we need to give a new meaning to the notion of *vertical*, which is conceived in classical psychoanalysis in terms of hierarchy and authority in terms of two generations only. Baba Copper, in *Over the Hill: Reflections on Ageism Between Women* (1988), insists that the traditional pattern of the nuclear family – with the mother caring for others and no one caring for the mother (that is to say, no patterns of reciprocity being established), itself generates ageism – and that we see this reflected in the women's movement. She is virulent about the traditional role of the grandmother, calling it one of the 'horrors' of old age, railing against 'the humiliation and self-sacrifice built into the role of the grandmother' (ibid.: 6). (I should note, however, that she too limits her analysis to two generations of feminists.) Nancy Chodorow does give a new and positive meaning to the notion of a vertical relation between women in a recent essay in which she reports on a series of interviews she had in the early 1980s with women psychoanalysts who had trained in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s (1989). I greatly admire this essay. In it Chodorow seeks to understand across time, history, age, and several generations why these older women were not feminists in

Chodorow's own sense of the word. The title of her essay – 'Seventies questions for thirties women: gender and generation in a study of early women psychoanalysts' – suggests the answer to her question. It is a simple lesson, one we too often forget: we must remember to respect the differences rooted in history. We have no right to expect to hear the answers we would give to the questions we ask of generational others. It is a vain and immature enterprise to wish either to be mirrored at our age (what is it? how old are you? *tell*), or to enter automatically into struggle.

What Chodorow conveys is precisely a sense of mutual recognition (Benjamin, 1988) between two generations widely separated by time and other generations but brought together in part by the very wish for understanding – that is, connection. But not symbiosis. We do not find, *pace* Kristeva, an 'undifferentiated community of women' (1980b: 279). Exactly not.

Chodorow had thought these older women, whom she esteemed in so many other ways, were – of all things – gender-blind. Through time and conversation she came to conclude that they had a different form of gender-consciousness, or gender identity. She came to see, she writes, that 'differences in women's interpretations of a situation may be understood not only in terms of structural categories like class and race but also historically, culturally, and generationally' (1989: 200). She came to recognize that 'hyper-gender-sensitivity' characterizes women of her – and I will say with Chodorow *our* – generation (ibid.: 218). One of the rare achievements of Chodorow's essay, which I hasten to add is not in any way eloquent (it does not move us emotionally to understanding), is its sense or tone of deep respect. This is achieved in part, I think, through its rhetoric of candour which disarms the hierarchy associated with positions of truth, a position that Chodorow has given up.

It is the time for many of us to invent ourselves consciously and critically as older women, making the place we want for ourselves to the best of our abilities. If the older woman has been a missing person in psychoanalysis and in feminist criticism in general, this is fortunately not the case in contemporary culture. Older women are making it, if we only know where to look. Women – and not all of them older – are contributing to the representation of older women. I am thinking, for example, of Yvonne Rainer's recent films, of the work of the performance artists Suzanne Lacey and Rachel Rosenthal, of Margaret Drabble's novel *A Natural Curiosity*, of Annie Dillard's *An American Childhood*, of Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, of so much of Marguerite Duras's writing, of Alice Noggle's photographs of old women, of Cecelia Condit's videotape *Not a Jealous Bone*. There is much more: rich and varied work for us to investigate and to live into the future with, for identifications

do not cease with childhood nor is fantasy bound only to infancy. As Teresa Brennan suggests, we make not just formative identifications but also identifications that permit different ways of thinking – and, I would add, of living (1989: 10). And the phantasmatic, as Laplanche and Pontalis emphasize, is constantly drawing in new materials (1973: 317).

Informing my paper is a fantasy of a particular kind of older woman, one I confess is narcissistic, although it is a very general one (one you could not guess from my opening anecdote). Chodorow, drawing on the work of Judith Kestenberg, concludes that for women analysts of the 1930s whom she interviewed, three faces of femininity presented themselves: motherhood, sexuality, and intellectual work (1989: 210). In my essay I have been implicitly privileging the latter aspect of the older woman – intellectual work, characterizing a woman who as a teacher and writer is bound through her work to many generations. When I was young this is how I perceived many older women, including my grandmother. I am not alone in this, of course. I do not think we should dismiss what our experience in everyday life has so often told us. It is common knowledge that struggle can ‘skip’ a generation, that many of us have formative relationships with women a generation, if not more, older than our mothers. I also think we should attend to Simone de Beauvoir’s second great book, an analysis as sweeping and trenchant as *The Second Sex*. I am referring of course to *La Vieillesse*, published under the title *The Coming of Age* in the US, a book which has been virtually ignored by feminists.

In closing, then, I want to echo my opening anecdote with words drawn not out of my memory but from my recent reading. They are taken from a collection of essays by bell hooks, a black American who teaches at Yale (1990). ‘bell hooks’ (also known as Gloria Watkins) is in fact the name of her great-grandmother which Watkins took as her own, a name signifying ‘talking back’ (1986–7). bell hooks (who is she then?). She writes about going to school in the rural south and the women there. She tells us in her essay ‘The Chitlin circuit’,

It was a world of single older black women school teachers, they had taught your mama, her sisters, and her friends. They knew your people in ways that you never would and shared their insight, keeping us in touch with generations. It was a world where we had history.

(bell hooks, 1990: 33)

To her grandmother Sarah Hooks Oldham, a woman with a ‘renegade nature’ who instructed bell in the ways of establishing ‘kinship and connection’, a woman who could not read or write, a long-lived woman who had taught her so much, to her bell hooks dedicates an essay in this collection. It is a portrait of her grandmother as a maker of quilts, of

'history worked by hand' (ibid.: 115). Entitled 'Aesthetic inheritances', this essay is a tribute to an older woman, as in a way also is mine. Here the Freudian stormy emotions of two-generational same-sex Oedipal violence are nowhere in evidence, much less privileged. Not at all.

It may be wondered if in my emphasis on the subtle emotions (I will use Sartre's word), on a quiet and companionable geniality in my case, on a boisterous conviviality in the case of bell hooks, I have not strayed too close to that emotion – or better, mood – held most in contempt in contemporary cultural studies. I am, of course, referring to nostalgia. Nostalgia is generally associated with a regressive and weak, wistful longing for the past – with, in short, a retrograde politics.¹⁷ But neither hooks – if I may speak for her – nor I have a desire to return to the past.

Nor am I arguing that certain emotions are specifically, essentially female, and others male. What I have been concerned to do is to see where the analysis of an affect – the mood of convivial ease – would lead me, and it took me to the figure of the older woman, who was in fact present in my past all along, and who will be – 'she' will be 'I' – present in my future, time willing.

NOTES

- 1 See, for example, Morwenna Griffiths, 'Feminism, feelings and philosophy' (1988).
- 2 Benjamin writes: 'What I call *mutual recognition* includes a number of experiences commonly described in the research on mother-infant interaction: emotional attunement, mutual influence, affective mutuality, sharing states of mind' (1988: 16). For Benjamin the analogue in adult life to mother-infant interaction is erotic union. I would disagree and argue that a reciprocal sociality, in its many modes, is a more appropriate model. I would further disagree with Benjamin's insistence that we can share feeling states with other people; I do not think we can ever know that.
- 3 The complete sentence reads: 'The stormy passions of a nature that inspires and consumes, passions in which other men have their richest experience, appear not to have touched him' (Freud 1953–74: 11: 75).
- 4 Grossberg's distinction between libidinal economies of desire and affective economies of mood resonates with Winnicott's distinction between doing and being (Winnicott associates the former with masculinity, the latter with femininity). See Winnicott, 'Creativity and its origins' (1971).
- 5 I am indebted to Kaja Silverman's reading of these essays (see n.12). I am also grateful to Tim Murray for his helpful comments. Elizabeth Grosz calls this identification of the birth mother with her own mother 'vertiginous' (1989: 80), which, I would argue, it certainly need not be.
- 6 Luce Irigaray also makes this point (1985).
- 7 It is of the utmost importance that we specify *which* generation. Both Freud and Lacan have commented on the explosive emotions of sibling rivalry. Lacan, for example, is fond of quoting St Augustine on this point: 'I have seen with my own eyes and know very well an infant in the grip of jealousy: he could not yet speak, and already he observed his foster-brother, pale and

with an unenclosed state' (1977: 26). Freud links the drive to knowledge, or epistemophilia, to the arrival of a new baby, which stimulates the child's sexual curiosity. The question to be asked is: where do babies come from? Freud develops this idea in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) 1953-74: 7: 194-5. See also his 'Notes upon a case of obsessional neurosis' (1909) 1953-74: 10: 237-49.

For recent work on epistemophilia from a feminist point of view, see Toril Moi, 'Patriarchal thought and the drive for knowledge' (1989). Moi concludes, 'If reason is always already shot through with the energy of the drives, the body, and desire, to be intellectual can no longer be theorized simply as the "opposite" of being emotional or passionate' (ibid.: 203). See also the brilliant essay by Gloria-Jean Masciarotte, 'The Madonna with Child, and another child, and still another child . . . : sensationalism and the dysfunction of emotions' (1991-92). Masciarotte observes that in a later edition of *Three Essays* Freud 'notes that girls never question a new baby. This', she concludes, 'suggests a different relation to knowledge, a different ordering of curiosity and expectations based on gender' (ibid.: 124, n.8).

- 8 In her 1989 essay Irigaray comments on the difference between the play of little boys and little girls in the absence of the mother. Irigaray contrasts the famous Freudian paradigm of play for little boys (Freud's grandson Ernst and the spool, the solitary game of *fort-da*), which she reads as play with an *object* (the mother is 'reduced' to an object), with the little girl's play with a doll, which she regards as a 'quasi-object', because the 'mother's identity as a subject is the same as hers' (ibid.: 132). This is convincing enough, although I would argue that the doll could be either a boy doll or a girl doll; it does not matter, as we shall see. More important, it is not at all necessary to hypothesize the *mother's absence*. The daughter's play can – and often does – go on in the presence of the mother. My point is that these two models of play, based on gender, are *not* symmetrical. Finally, Irigaray concludes (not on the basis of this paradigm alone, of course) that the 'mother always remains too familiar and too close' (ibid.: 133); this also need not necessarily be the case. I should add that Freud himself saw the little girl's relation to her doll in terms of subject and object. As he puts it in 'Female sexuality' (1931), the child 'actually makes its mother into the object and behaves as the active subject towards her' (1953-74: 21: 236).
- 9 It is not surprising that many feminists, critiquing Freudian psychoanalysis (and its patriarchal followers), have chosen to do so precisely in terms of sexuality itself, and in terms of same-sex or lesbian practices. For excellent recent work in this vein, see Parveen Adams, 'Of female bondage' (1989), and Teresa de Lauretis, 'Film and the primal fantasy – one more time: On Sheila McLaughlin's *She Must Be Seeing Things*' (1990-91).
- 10 I discuss gender and generational identity with reference to Eva Figes's novel *Waking in Aging and Its Discontents* (Woodward, 1991: 92-108).
- 11 With regard to the hysteric, Freud explains in his letter 52 of 6 December 1896 to Wilhelm Fliess, the internal exchange between the two generations this way: 'an exchange occurs between the generations: first generation: Perversion, second generation: Hysteria, and consequent, sterility' (Freud, 1954: 180).
- 12 The word 'choric' is, of course, a reference to Kristeva. For a thoughtful discussion of several of the texts by Kristeva and Freud to which I have referred here, see Silverman (1988: 101-86). Silverman argues that the little girl's attachment to the mother in the pre-Oedipal period is one of both identification and object-choice (sexuality enters her analysis here in a way that it

does not enter mine); and as one point she suggests, albeit tentatively, that 'although there is a third term, and it is - as usual - the father', she 'cannot help but wonder whether there is not another, more important third term here, one that plays a far more central place within the daughter's early libidinal economy than does the father. I refer, of course, to the child' (ibid.: 153). Thus Silverman reads Robert Altman's 1977 film *Three Women* in terms of three generations of women. But she does not pursue this analysis.

- 13 Interestingly enough, Freud identifies one of the conflicts central to Leonardo's character as that between knowledge (reason) and emotion, concluding that Leonardo sublimated passion into the search for knowledge. Could one not say the same of Freud himself?
- 14 We might note, for example, that Teresa de Lauretis prefaces her essay 'The violence of rhetoric' with an epigraph from Nietzsche. It is a quotation from *The Gay Science* that begins: 'Older women are more skeptical in their heart of hearts than any man'. De Lauretis, however, generalizes from 'older women' to 'woman': the opening line of her essay reads: 'Woman's skepticism, Nietzsche suggests, comes from her disregard for truth' (de Lauretis, 1987: 31). Mary Ann Doane, on the other hand, comments pointedly on the recurrent image of the older woman in Nietzsche (see her 'Veiling over desire: close-ups of the woman' (1989)).
- 15 The bibliography is too lengthy to be rehearsed here. One of the most influential books, of course, is Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978). See also, for example, *The (M)Other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, edited by Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane, and Madelon Sprengnether (1985) and Luce Irigaray, *Le Corps-à-corps avec la mère* (1981).
- 16 I am here echoing Rosi Bradotti (who is referring, of course, to Irigaray), 'The politics of ontological difference' (1989: 96). Yet even as Bradotti subscribes to the project of constructing a new female symbolic and reads Irigaray's work as a strategic intervention in patriarchal culture, she nevertheless seems to subscribe to what psychoanalysis has had to say about generational politics. Bradotti:

The psychoanalytic situation brings about, among other things, the fundamental dissymmetry between self and other, that is constitutive of the subject; this is related to the non-interchangeability of positions between analyst and patient, to the irrevocable anteriority of the former, that is to say, ultimately to time. Time, the great master, calling upon each individual to take his/her place in the game of generations, is the inevitable, the inescapable horizon. One of the ethical aims of the psychoanalytic situation is to lead the subject to accept this inscription into time, the passing of generations and the dissymmetries it entails, so as to accept the radical otherness of the self.

(Bradotti, 1989: 98)

Thus Bradotti can speak elsewhere in the same essay of that old bugaboo - generation gaps.

- 17 See, for example, Renato Rosaldo, 'Imperialist nostalgia' (1989).

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