

Joan Retallack

Gender is a chronically, mercifully ambiguous figure in the binary agons of Western Culture

Ambiguous figures put our perceptual system at a curious disadvantage; because they give no clue of which bet to make, and so it never settles for one bet. The great advantage of an active system of this kind is that it can often function in the absence of adequate information by postulating alternative realities. But sometimes it makes wrong decisions which may be disastrous.

R.L. Gregory, *Eye and Brain*

THE EXPERIMENTAL FEMININE

Attention Deficit Disorder is for the moment our ubiquitous cultural disease. What brings art to life, what makes life—even the most difficult life—worth living, is a quality of sustained attention.

K. Callater, *Reports from Teerts Egdir: The Other Book*

Attention (chronically) scattered manages to find patterns of caring in the debris of the (chronically) interrupted life. Life that's (chronically) life—isn't that what's meant by the feminine?

Genre Tallique, *GLANCES: An Unwritten Book*

1.

Molière might have gotten it (almost) right were he around today: Yes, poetry is certainly all that is not prose and vice versa. (Though there is prose poetry) Feminine is all that is not masculine and vice versa. (Though there are feminine men, and masculine women.) Art is all that is not business as usual and vice versa. (Though there is the art market.) The experimental feminine is all that is not business as usual and vice versa. No qualifiers here. Can the same be said of experimental poetry? Yes to the extent that one identifies it with the experimental feminine. Wait. What?

2.

Of course we know that biologically female-male traits are on a continuum in humans unlike other animals, which tend to be terminally either/or. But female and male don't necessarily correspond to what one means by the cultural terms feminine and masculine. Those terms function in our culture more like an agonistic yin-yang.

3.

Why is discomfort with experiment in the arts so persistent and widespread? Unlike attitudes toward science, the relation between innovation and tradition in aesthetic projects has been troubling since at least the nineteenth century identification of an avant-garde. One could say there are conservative tendencies built into any *habitus*, but to the extent that modernity defines itself through its ongoing experiments in thought and living, every crisis of conservation versus transfiguration should present an opportunity to make new meaning.

Which is to say, experiment and tradition should, in an ideal world, form the dialogic energy that creates vital cultures. In fact nothing of interest happens without this synergy which is not to say that it's business as usual. Our Western cultural image resembles a brain with a severed corpus callosum—each side functionally innocent of the other. Did an evil surgery occur while we were all asleep in one fairy tale or another? One side happily thinks everything is simple; the other side unhappily thinks everything is complex. In this chronic bifurcation, a potentially collaborative “we” is missing the fact that complex dynamics aren’t monsters lurking in forests, threatening the simple pleasures of blue skies. They are the forest. They are the blue skies. They are our entire natural-cultural environment. They may indeed consume us, but this is only a grim certainty if we don’t embrace them with respect and understanding. Since

Mandelbrot presented us with computer models of the fractal geometry of nature, we have recognized the beauty in forms of chaos, which is inherently fractal. It was apparent before in turbulent romantic landscapes, but not yet identified as global dynamic principle. Perhaps our dysfunction, at this point has less to do with a paucity of intellectual and aesthetic evidence than the lingering wound of Occam's razor regularly sharpened by market logics. Chaos theorists may tell us that things are not as simple as we'd like them to be, but can we afford to believe that?

It's well known that scientists, in what has been a characteristically masculine enterprise, strategically ask only answerable questions. This is the reason for their great success, carefully defining the progress they make within parameters that tend to exclude the messiness of everyday life.¹ Speculation directed toward a frank unintelligible and complex unknown are a waste of time when one needs quantifiable results, not to say well-funded budgets. Despite this (luckily!) there are accidental discoveries, swerves of intuition that bring on shifts of perspective. But scientific logics of discovery aren't going to help us make bridges between the complex nature of reality and the extreme sport of everyday life. Or the complex realisms of today's experimental arts.

The playful improbability of thought experiments in the arts are only strangely germane. Like inquiry in the sciences, they start from questions and guesses and put variables into motion to see what happens—see the entire opus of Gertrude Stein or John Cage—but they are more wager than legitimate experimental design because—in the most exciting instances—results are radically unpredictable, radically incompressible into summaries and rationales. Feminine dyslogic—the need to operate outside official logics—is essential because official logics exist to erase any need to operate outside official logics, i.e., the feminine. If this seems circular it's because it is. The *habitus* tends to be self-reinforcing. What is unintelligible within the rules of intelligibility of an institution is either invisible or threatening. The masculine is most intelligible in its need to prove that it isn't feminine—pliant, forgiving, polylogical. These are traits that have characterized the need to maintain immediate connections with others; they are also an aggressive affirmation of life principles whose beauty lies in independence from institutional necessities of abstraction, estrangement, tunnel vision, programmatic depression. Helen in Euripides' *Trojan Women* says to Menelaus, "Your first acts are arguments of terror to come."² The arguments of terror have followed an inexorable internal logic century after century for millennia. They would seem to be as incontrovertible as the direction of history itself were it not

for the improbable feminine swerve that can shift the scene from one logic to others whose path is less obvious. Why feminine? Not because men can't do it, viz, Einstein, Joyce, Mandelbrot, et al.

Remember Athena, the *dea ex machina* (written into the tragedy by male playwrights) and other eloquently persuasive feminine logics in the long arguments of Masculine-Feminine (i.e., Apollonian-Dionysian) that constituted Ancient Greek culture.³ The larger than Life/Death composite Greek, whose early fate-driven exploits and later turn toward rationalism the Western we has worshiped equally, engages in loutish campaigns to destroy the barbarian Other. That the Homer-Plato-Aristotle nexus is the founder of a Western canon that, until recently, managed to erase otherness made it difficult, until recently, to see Troy as just one of many ancient Bosnias or that Aristotle's student Alexander the Great can be compared—in his campaigns to crush “barbarians” under the stamp of the Hellenic uberculture—to any other imperialistic killing tyrant. Yet what the poet Rosmarie Waldrop has called "the ancient misogynists,"⁴ have among them the playwright Euripides who in his apparent disdain for some of the founding myths of his own times, articulated dramatic pleas for an ethics of peace that were voiced by female characters.

In fact, most of the psychological power (and implicit social critique?) of Euripides' plays derives from the role of the antagonistic Feminine in Greek culture. This, in dialogue with the brutal arguments of the Masculine. One can read Nietzsche's exploration of the Apollonian-Dionysian agon in *The Birth of Tragedy*, his own reading of Euripides' *Bacchae* (“The Bacchic, or Dionysian, Women”) in M-F terms. In Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, as well as the two *Iphigenias*, *Electra*, *The Phoenician Women*, *The Bacchae*, *The Medea*, *Helen*, *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, *The Trojan Women*... the scale and range of the Feminine is enormous as site of impassioned alternatives—sometimes laced with irony—to logics of a purely masculine power.

Albeit, there is no pretty picture—women do great domestic harm, men cut a broader social swath, though it remains on the scale of family and tribal lineage. But the logic is confoundingly complex and this is useful—a puzzle that reminds one of the conceptual work we still need to do. The women of Athens who choose to follow F-Dionysus against M-official codes are not sold as slaves as Pentheus (spokesman for the law of the father) threatens in the beginning of the play, but end up literally dismantling him. The female character who is the instrument of this murder is Agave. She has proudly abandoned her F-loom to undertake the M-

hunt. In taking on the Masculine ethos in her opposition to Masculine repression, she inadvertently takes revenge on her own son, Pentheus. The bitterest irony of all is that the women feel they have outdone the men, killing without weapons and armor: Agave has torn apart her son's body with her bare hands. There's no way to identify Euripides' opinion of all this. Among other hindrances, is the fact that a large part of the end of the play is missing. But there is more than a textual lacuna. What we don't know about Greek culture, its remove from the schooling of our own intuitions, has made all the literature a richly productive Rorshach exercise.

In reading and rereading the *Bacchae*, what continues to fascinate me is that the divergent logics of Masculine-Feminine, Apollonian-Dionysian have equal power. Nietzsche recognizes this. In his interpretive exegesis, neither Apollo nor Dionysis are victor; the agon must go on. The vital dynamism comes from the destabilizing Feminine principle that makes it necessary to constantly reestablish—with highly charged energy—the threatened equilibrium. Some classicists have faulted Euripides for the very "feminine" traits that Montaigne identifies with the moving principles of the essay—incoherence and inconsistency. Those unsteady states can be transvalued into strategic disequilibria necessary in the attempt to find one's way—poetically or essayistically—through culturally unintelligible unprecedented times, whether that be fifth century BCE or third millennium CE. The culturally productive M-F agon of ancient Greece turns out to have been a chaotic system, a dynamic equilibrium of order and disorder, on its way to local extinction in the Peloponnesian wars. But many of its patterns remain in the agon of our own times. It's interesting that the particular angle of the averted feminine gaze seen on the Hellenic vase, called *aidos*—demonstration of respect, modesty and submission in the presence of a powerful man—is present today in a feminine geometry of attention to one's place in relation to a potential locus of desire. It can be enacted by a man, a shy boy, a girl, a woman.

4.

An invidious understanding of the Feminine has been as indeterminate, contingent, fuzzy thinking. At least until it came to be selectively valued—in computer technology and the complex sciences. In literature, to work in acknowledgment of the limits of logics, to break through to less intelligible forms has been an act of poethical courage. The investigative methods of Stein, Woolf, Joyce, Beckett, Pound, Cage, Oulipeans and Language poets are dedicated to

expanding the fields of linguistic projects. Ironically, it's been particularly courageous for women to work in the territory of the Feminine, insofar as it can be called distracted, interrupted, cluttered, out of control. The question hovers in the culture, Does a woman do this only because she is so incapacitated by gendered life circumstances she can do nothing else? In fact, the suggestive, humorous juxtapositions that emerge out of the disarray (which is of course the habitat of the male of the species as well) can, when they enter the work, demonstrate that there are many more logics of connection, distinction and value than are dreamt of in our Aristotelian or Cartesian philosophies. Rosmarie Waldrop and Ann Lauterbach have notably explored juxtapositional logics in essays literally made out of counterpositioned, contrapuntal meditations and quotations.⁵ The fundamental fact is that the Feminine chaos of the juggled life or the exploding novel or the experimental essay or the Feminine silence of the minimalist experimental work, meditatively finding its way, is always bounded by patterns of dual-gendered human interest.

Imagine the vital work of making our contemporary space-time livable, promising!, without the dynamic disequilibrium of our energetic binaries (even Buddhism would not exist without the starting point of ego vs. world) past and future, feminine and masculine. Or rather, what would attempts to act on stereotypically hypertrophied Feminine or Masculine alone look like? F: sentimental irresponsibility? M: rigid, defensive tribal and national identities, ungiving hierarchical principles, concentrated authority, reflexive aggression in a repetition compulsion that overrides desires for peace? The latter, which I've admittedly strung out because I think it creates the worst of the conditions in which we actually live is a generically "heroic" ideal that puts action first, nationalist plot development above all. Total erasure, brute conquest of the unintelligible other—as in what made Alexander (and now America?) Great—may be entirely compelling if you've had no training in the richness of ambiguity, or the choreography of contingent ideas reconfiguring their relations in motion. Of course, unadulterated by reason, all this can bring on "New Age" vapidities. But this may be a fate not worse than the memento mori of the progeny of Aristotelian logic which remain eternally fixed in delusions of universal absolutes and therefore empty of useful meaning. To wit, Wittgenstein's remark, "But in fact all propositions of logic say the same thing, to wit nothing."⁶

Could it be that to know history—or anything else for that matter—too well is to fatally reinscribe its logical outline in self-fulfilling prophesies as well as narrative accounts? The

familiar grammars of the narrative outline are empty forms that offer no resistance to the onrush of habitual responses. In the linked mechanisms of destruction and nostalgia, the past—like Homer's Penelope—is desired as hermetically knowable, reliable, sealed in mythic form as locus of return whose QED is repetition. This is fantasy knowledge resolutely unavailable to reality checks. The fixed image of the Venerated Feminine, the fixed image of the Virgin Mary, Goethe's Eternal Feminine offer untroubled Edenic memory traces free of the logical excess that is curiosity. (How long did *curiositas* remain a sin in the Christian church?⁷) The time before She became curious must go on in the image of the domestic world as Eden. A masculine romantic reimagining of the ideal object (but not mechanism) of memory as woman—mother, wife, lover—source of one's being, above all dependably there, embraces the need to burrow into creamy respite from a world whose turbulence resists fixing. We may think we're beyond all this now in our postfeminist self-images, but the sexual politics that drives the nuclear family is hard for young women to resist.

Another possibility?—the experimental feminine shaping history conceived not as fateful adumbration, but as dynamic coastline where past and present meet in the transformative rim of our recombinatory poesis. Epicurus is one candidate for patron saint of the experimental feminine. The philosopher Hans Blumenberg has this to say about the Epicurean way around certain dichotomies:

[For] Epicurus...the chaos of the atomic vortices has a reassuring dependability that surpasses the guarantees traditionally provided by the gods...Epicurus makes current once again the Greeks' authentic concept of nature which they conceived of as...a mode of processes that proceed from themselves, of their own accord. The demiurge, the unmoved mover, the 'world reason' had replaced this concept of nature with a supposedly more dependable factor, which allowed the world to be interpreted according to the model of the intentional product of human action. The crucial fact is that Epicurus was able to eliminate and exclude from human consciousness this god laden with care for the world...only by building into the world process certain 'constants,' by making chaos into a sort of 'ideal disorder' and thus, as Kant reproaches the 'shameless' Epicurus, "really [deriving] reason from unreason."⁸

What's the difference between the unintelligible world of the Feminine and the knowable ideal of the Masculine? Counter to common wisdom, I want to assert that one (F) is a challenge; the

other (M), a mystique. To the extent that the Feminine is forced into service as consolation for the loss of meaning within the emptiness of logics of "world reason," the energy of a productively conversational M-F is lost to culture.

Desires to escape the world's chaos are understandable, but there's no real escape hatch in nostalgia. It's a temporary sedative at best. The past is not an exotic vacation spot arrived at in conceptual time machines. If I decide I want to visit the past, I walk out into the day, locate a book, a dig, a film, some sort of archive, or I stay home and prowl the internet. History is nothing other than the infinitely intricate present that surrounds us—the panoply of residues and effects, accidental and chosen—that adorn and litter the landscape of our desires. The arts of nostalgia, including the Homeric ones, operate in that material field adding to the debris that covers over the problem of the repetition compulsion designed to erase anxieties of futurity but that ironically recreates all the things (from the past) we fear most: wars of sovereignty, chatteling of women, racism..... One might call these things the fringe maleffects of attempts to live by fantasy logics—those in particular of fundamentalism, domination, and nostalgia.

In the usual allocation of conceptual labor the fantasy past (Penelope) is Feminine, history (Odysseus) is Masculine. Let's imagine another version. Is it that the probable is Masculine; the improbable, Feminine, but the swerve that brings on possibility must become hermaphrodite, androgyne, mongrel, cyborg, queer, lovely freak, the unintelligibility that reveals life continuing as continuing surprise? Are there piquant unintelligibilities that draw curiosity toward possibility? Eve is the prototype of the Experimental Feminine. Her inquisitiveness, her desire to try something new frees the virtual couple from their virtual paradise. A new complex realist story has been ready to begin for a very long time.

Experiments in every discipline are born out of the unanswered questions, the unfulfilled improbabilities of the past, but also out of the radically unintelligible nature of the contemporary. Out of being--now, more and more—in unprecedented positions from which we—any "we," any "one," must reinvent the terms of engagement and move on. Tradition gives us navigational coordinates but topographies are changing even as we pick up our instruments to determine where we are, have been, might have been.... Who we are, might be, is every bit as much in flux. It's common to think of identities and traditions as useful limiting structures, points of departure from the known. But epistemological reality principles, like all others, shrivel without the dicey pleasures of interpermeability, motion, susceptibility to chance occurrences. Isn't it

more fruitful to think of Identity and Tradition in ongoing, transformative conversation with a changing world? Dynamic systems models like fractal (cultural) coastlines or cultural DNA shift attention from narrow defensible borders to broad interactions among material, formal principles and possibility.

5.

A structure is simply an inside and an outside.

Buckminster Fuller

Experiment—with its carefully structured invitation to surprise—is the paradigmatic interrogative conversation between the insistent intelligible and the silent unintelligible, intention and chance, structure and process. In an aesthetic context, the question is always a tripartite composition—of material, form and meaning (what has been made of possibility). What twentieth century innovative artists came to see is that the form that the experiment takes is not preliminary to the answer, not preliminary to the creation of the art object. *It is* the answer. *It is* the art. Just as the essay is not the result of the investigation, it is the investigation going on in writing that in the radical mode of any lively thought, does not, at any given point, know entirely where it's going. This means that its openness to its inability to conclude, its refusal to know, rather than to sense, suspect, consider, theorize, contemplate, hypothesize, conjecture, wager....forms it as an experience of being in the world where uncertain and unpredictable life principles (in contrast to prescriptive rules) always exceed the scope of logical inference or imagination. This is the moving principle of the essay which is distinctly feminine in its violations of masculine orthodoxy, the rule-bound “law of the fathers” that some feminist theorists have unfortunately mistaken as the only principles we have.

Any truly contemporary art is experimental because to be actively engaged with one's contemporariness is to be in conversation with the unintelligible. Too often critics who would be the first to agree that nothing can be created *ex nihilo* reflexively dismiss these conversations as spurning tradition. Though every generation faces problems unknown to previous ones, artists are artists because they have loved the work of artists before them; they spend their lives in conversation with the dead as well as the living, as well as with what they know they don't know

in both terror and wonder. The present is what we, in the urgency of the unprecedented, with the pressures of rapid-fire transformations all around us, make of the past; and of course it's what the past has made of us. The contemporary is no more or less than a further complication of history that makes experiment, as critical dialogue with history, the poethical enactment of optimism. It asks, despite pressures to hunker down and minimize risks, What's possible? It's amazing / It's not surprising how unsettling that question can be.

Our default survival modes create awkward contradictions. Change is a defining principle of life; it's also a signal of peril. Resistance to change is an important defense; inflexible hunkering down is death. Not surprising that so much of our thought is dichotomous. It's hard to resolve such exigent contraries. Wittgenstein's ladder can never be abandoned. The stock of conceptual puzzles will never run out. We'll always have to rethink the perennial sticking points at the construction sites of our humanity. That, in fact *is* the construction site—conceptual minefield bracketed by our all-time, top-ten or so binary hits: e.g., Masculine-Feminine, Determinism-Freedom, Order-Disorder.⁹ These three examples are dynamically interrelated principles, differential non-equations, integral to what I'm calling the "experimental feminine."

One way to think of them is in terms of Buckminster Fuller's elegantly minimalist definition of structure. Each term in these contesting binaries is the outside of the other's inside: each an alternative and/or complementary and/or argumentative and/or critical and/or destructive logic in relation to the other. The problem this poses for ordinary discourse is that we have the same kind of trouble seeing an inside and an outside simultaneously that we have seeing both vase and profiles in Edgar Rubin's famous ambiguous figure. This means we habitually feel we must rank or choose between the terms of a binary. (Which is figure, which ground? If both are figure, which is dominant?) But in fact, these terms (as terms) describe only the most easily identifiable limits at either end of a sinuous, moving range of nuanced possibilities.

It's a difficult conceptual shift to go from freeze-frame contraries, staked out at oppositional extremes, to the idea of a dynamic continuum even though that continuum is the field in which we live. In fact we do see the ambiguous figure of the fused binary M-F as constantly shifting and we must interpret and reinterpret the visual cues around us in fluid recognition / creation of changing patterns. The speaker at a conference on identity asks, Why do binaries keep returning even after they've been deconstructed? My provisional answer is that they are in agonistic definitional relation to one another. You can't have one without the other.

You can't have either without both. Masculine-Feminine, Rational-Irrational...are terms that locate limiting conditions for a very complex range of mixes and possibilities that wiggle, slip, slide, elide, combine, recombine, morph, mongrelize. Binaries play the social role of bracketing the noise, the silences, the messy misfits we don't have the cultural energy or angle of vision to attend to.

This is finally the problem we have with all ambiguous figures—from profile/vase/profile to homosexuals (in Spanish, *los ambiguos*), mongrels, of every kind. We want clear and coherent, clean and well-lit stories. Perhaps sometimes, as Page du Bois puts it in her discussion of Euripides' questioning of the motive of the story, to stop pain.¹⁰ The narrative impulse is to make things right. And there is also the impatience that cures its restlessness in a fixed gaze with enough depth of field to locate a vanishing point and no more. This is a picture of settled, singular images, fixed ratios. (How many drops of blood or hormones tip the balance, shift the whole scene toward irremediable otherness?) All the while we know (or should know) that absolute determination of ratios in living systems is impossible. They're always changing.

Some aesthetic forms fix, others engender flux. Of course, this isn't a static opposition either. Most do both in different degrees. Any work of art can be explored as a foregrounding, one way or another, of this problematic. Our minds are too dynamic to stop the flow of definitions and distinctions. Artists best demonstrate this by performative, rather than descriptive means. (Euripides' irresolute treatment of the Feminine is a case in point.) Gertrude Stein, a mater of ambiguities, had a life-long preoccupation with the problem of description. She had no interest in fixing her poetic gaze. Like the Cubists, Gestalt psychologists, (and, for that matter, biologists) she found life/art principles in motility. It is the first characteristic of the form of life that is her writing. Her implicit theory of description is not one of pointed linguistic skewer, but of fluidly dynamic perceptual field. In "An Acquaintance with Description," Stein writes,

She said she did not believe in there having there having been there having been there having been there before. Refusing to turn away.

A description refusing to turn away a description.

...An acquaintance with description or what is the difference between not what is the difference between not an acquaintance in description. An acquaintance in description.

First a sea gull looking into the grain in order to look into the grain it must be flying as if it were looking at the grain.

...This comes to be a choice and we are the only choosers.¹¹

6.

It was a pleasure to find the New York Times dance critic, Anna Kisselgoff, discussing an actively permeable global discourse between experiment and tradition—another ambiguous figure?—in her review of the October 1999 International New Dance Festival in Montreal:

How can one remain inspired by tradition but break free of its clichés as a creative artist?...The emergence of experimental African choreographers is not exclusively a 1990's phenomenon...By the same token...well known European choreographers [like] Mathilde Monnier...use African dancers in pieces stemming from their visits to Africa, reveal[ing] how much two-way traffic is in progress...The choreographers Seydou Boro and Salia Sanou from Burkina Faso, as well as Gnapa Béatrice Kombé of the stunning Tchétché female troupe from the Ivory Coast, have studied or danced with Ms. Monnier in Montpellier, France. Since Ms. Monnier's mentor was the American teacher Viola Farber, once Merce Cunningham's partner, the line of descent and influences is more complex than first apparent.¹²

The longer one looks the more complex everything becomes, but how long can one expect anyone to sustain attention? Everyone knows how hard it is these days. Perhaps it was hard in those days too, but the consequences of inattention are multiplied at higher speeds, in greater congestion. The mind more than ever needs to make meaningful patterns out of the purposeful play of its own motions in and out of sync with the motions of the rest of the world. It also needs to know how to be very still, to find and listen to the silences, the emerging patterns in all the noise. In those silences, those unintelligibilities, lie the forms of our futures. Why do I say this? Because what is intelligible is already the past. As Stein puts it in "Composition as Explanation,"¹³ Classics are "what having become past is classified." Silence and unintelligibility are the loci of immanent futurity. We require the discipline of attention that one notices in the play of healthy children or, indeed, in the high-wired, experimental choreography of a Merce

Cunningham (working with bodies) or a John Cage (working with sounds and words and visual matter) or a Gertrude Stein (working with words and ideas).

I've just gone backwards in time for most of my examples. That path is habitual. It's harder to sense how what's currently going on fits into concepts of a developing contemporary. This is why, in a poethics of experiment, I've added an aitch to "poetics." I think of that aitch itself as a feminizing, adulterating of the word/world as brought to us by the paradigmatic Aristotle. Perhaps I should call this transgressive lettristic feminine principle the "Scarlet Aitch."

Author's Note: This essay is published in slightly different form in my book on poethics, *The Poethical Wager*. Lately I've been attempting to further distinguish useful ways of thinking about the experimental attitude in relation to poetry and poetics. My keynote talk at the conference Pressure to Experiment is part of this project and will appear in the forthcoming issue of the online journal Jacket, a section of which will be devoted to papers from the conference.

¹ See the work of Thomas Kuhn on this, esp. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973) but also the title essay in *The Essential Tension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) for a discussion of the relation between invention and tradition in science.

² Euripides, *Complete Greek Tragedies*, vol. 3, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959) 645.

³ To forget the agonistic, dynamic disequilibria of feminine/masculine that has from the start given the characteristic shape to Western culture can lead to untenable positions of, e.g., phallogocentrism. Freud, in his fascination with Greek mythology did a very selective reading of it. See my discussion of recent phallogocentrisms among feminist theorists in ".RE:THINKING:LITERARY:FEMINISM:" in *The Poethical Wager* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004)

⁴ Waldrop, *Reproduction of Profiles*, 7.

⁵ See, e.g., Rosmarie Waldrop's "The Ground Is the Only Figure, Notebook Spring 1996," in *Impercipient Lecture Series*, 1, no.3, (April 1997) and Ann Lauterbach's series "The Night Sky" (I-VII) that appeared in the American Poetry Review from 1996-99.

⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 89.

⁷ See Hans Blumenberg's *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983) for a fascinating discussion of the obsession of the Church fathers with the sin of curiositas (which I, not he, label feminine) and the necessity to justify a methodical curiosity as "preparation for the Enlightenment."

⁸ Ibid., 159.

⁹ Masculine-Feminine—fluid, dialogic and migratory principles; Determinism-Freedom—most recently construed in terms of cultural construction rather than metaphysics; Order-Disorder—transvalued out of invidious comparison by John Cage's aesthetic (where they become intention and chance) and by Chaos theorists as the interdependent terms of all complex systems.

¹⁰ In duBois' brilliantly instructive and insightful account of ancient representations of women, *Sowing the Body*, she quotes the last lines of the character Clytemnestra in *Iphigeneia in Tauris*: "How know / That this is not a story merely told / That I may have relief from bitter pain?". duBois goes on to speculate, "This sotry may be a lie; the narrative of the tragedy may be a lie; all stories may be lies to stop pain. So Euripides puts his own text into question." (164)

¹¹ Gertrude Stein, *A Stein Reader*. ed. Ulla Dydo. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 505-6.

¹² Anna Kisselgoff, "Inspired by the Traditions of Africa but Ruled by a Contemporary Spirit," *New York Times*, Oct. 6, 1999, B-5.

¹³ Stein, *A Stein Reader*, 496.