

THE LOCUS OF DIFFERENCE
Considerations on gender diversity
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The ambiguity expressed by the title of this work is not unintentional: the purpose is to evoke, from the outset, the physical "locus" of the difference between the sexes, that is to say human anatomy. It is this unavoidable difference that has produced the two categories of "male" and "female" which affect the whole range of social and symbolic space. However, at the same time, I would like to suggest that there is another "locus" in which difference (and not only sexual difference) is equally unavoidable: the realm of imagery, where difference acquires both value and meaning (1). My aim is therefore to formulate a more effective definition of this "locus", without claiming to furnish solutions but rather seeking to identify the conceptual problems that lie at the core of gender diversity. In western society (2) the prevailing interpretation of difference is negative because of the potential danger that it represents to the desire for control of the hierarchical principle on which our society is founded. The underlying logic of this principle aims at both simplification and uniformity and so forces an otherwise ungovernable multiformity into the boundaries of legitimate social models. Differences are penalised as they are not in line with this logic and the resultant reductive models are therefore positioned along a vertical axis of inferiority/superiority.

Notwithstanding this prevailing concept of difference, a more positive assessment is beginning to gain ground in certain spheres of contemporary thought, thanks to that rupture of the imaginary that characterises our era: a rupture that is now allowing a new and coherent process of re-signification. This re-evaluation of difference (which is bringing some of the fundamental assumptions of hierarchical culture into question) is being fed by the theoretical contributions of at least three different currents of thought: reflections on gender and ecological thinking have both made the problem of difference central to their epistemology, as has anarchism, in which difference is a fundamental element of its theory. It is the interrelation of these currents that is giving rise to a multi-faceted, anti-hierarchical culture capable of challenging domination on a global basis. This aim will certainly not be easy to attain but presupposes an epistemological revolution that will affect the very foundations of western thought. It seems worthwhile, then, to briefly consider these cognitive patterns generally adopted by our society, which have profoundly influenced the two categories of "male" and "female" with which we are concerned.

The starting point is the inherently mythical structure of human knowledge. We can only perceive reality through the medium of our symbolic universe and so through its founding myths. Humanity cannot escape its own myths, it can neither exorcise them nor hold them at a distance. Arbitrariness seems therefore to be a basic and inescapable feature of human knowledge, although every culture claims to be based on objective criteria, which are perceived as such only within that specific context (3).

A further essential element of knowledge, which at one and the same time lays its foundations and defines its boundaries, is the emergence of Self, with its inevitable corollary of the emergence of the Other. This process concerns both the

individual and the species as a whole: just as the child must discover its uniqueness, so the species, in the process of acquiring knowledge, had to abandon the "oceanic sentiment" in order to attain self-consciousness, it had to abstract itself from a Whole that is incomprehensible in its totality. The emergence of knowledge, thus, brings with it a distance between the One and the Other and, as Cornelius Castoriadis puts it, this Self sees itself always as the centre of the world.

The appearance of the One and the Other, therefore, represents the passage from Chaos to Cosmos and the related process of signification. It is only with the emergence of the culture of domination that this process of signification is transformed into a process of subjugation and that the knowledge of Self becomes absolute rather than arbitrary: the dialectic between the One and the Other is replaced by the one-way relationship between the Subject and the Object, a binomial which marks the passage from duality to dichotomy, from distance to dissension and from complementarity to exclusion.

This cognitive structure based on opposing binomials attains one of its most effective expression in scientific rationality, which can very roughly and synthetically be defined as that instrumental knowledge which places value on control and prediction, which resorts to abstract models and which places the system above its elements and the entity above relatedness. It is a de-individualising and an-affective system of thought which postulates an objective knowledge based on the juxtaposition of intellect and emotions.

Nor is scientific rationality devoid of the gender connotation: one of the major achievements of recent feminist critique has been to lay bare that masculine "imprinting" in a system of thought that claimed to be neuter. Scientific imagery is based on those fundamental asymmetric divisions between mind and body, transcendence and immanence, intellect and emotions that all lead to the paradigmatic division on which our vision of the world lies: that between Culture and Nature. A sexual character is then attributed to these divisions, where men (defined as objective, unemotional, abstract) are assigned scientific mentality (and technical ability, in a world judged on the basis of technological progress), while women (defined as subjective, emotional, concrete) are allotted characteristics and fields which are extraneous to the ruling rationality (4).

The absurdity of such a cognitive structure lies in the marginalisation not only of one gender, but also of some operative and logical processes proper to human thought (5). While scientific rationality has allowed a considerable degree of technological development, in quantitative terms, from the point of view of quality, the privileging of certain processes over others has in fact limited the sphere of human ability. It therefore seems necessary to reconsider the intellectual hegemony claimed by scientific rationality and to postulate a recomposition of human cognitive patterns which goes beyond the hierarchical and dichotomic logic of western thought. In this perspective is necessary to highlight analogic as opposed to digital processes, symmetry as opposed to hierarchy, understanding rather than prediction, and the elements and relatedness rather than the system and the entity.

It is not only a matter of recomposing emotions and intellect, but also of overcoming the divide between the One/Subject and the Other/ Object. This is not to suggest that the One must cease to be the central point of the cognitive process (whether of the individual or of the species) but that consciousness of the Self

must be collocated not in a closed system, with the One representing the absolute centre, but rather in an open system in which it becomes a part of a complex system of multi-directional and multi-factorial relationships.

It must also be pointed out that recomposition does not mean assimilation.

Reassembling mind/intellect/transcendence and body/emotion/immanence does not mean annihilating their peculiarities in a synthesis, but rather including them in an integrated and variform perspective. The aim is not a symbiosis (which would eliminate the space between the One and the Other, placing self-consciousness in doubt), but the establishment of an empathy, a feeling, a reciprocity which will allow that uneliminable space to be crossed.

The recomposition of human thought must therefore begin with the recomposition of the fundamental binomial of Nature/Culture and the overcoming of the related conceptualisations that the hierarchical culture has bestowed on us. The anarchist analysis of domination as the organising principle of symbolic and social space, and the theoretical contribution of social ecology (6), which has brought to light the close relationship between the "domination of man over man" and the "domination of man over Nature", are both fundamental to this process. The feminist critique has applied a pair of essential concepts to this analysis in introducing the categories of "male" and "female". In effect, the exclusive appropriation of social and symbolic power by a specific group, the subordinate relationship of Nature to Culture and gender inequality are three fundamental and closely related elements of the hierarchical society in its patriarchal form (7).

At this point, I would like to draw a conceptual and terminological distinction that may be useful to further reflections, even if it risks recreating that antinomy between Nature and Culture that I have just criticised. It concerns the terms "sex" and "gender". Definitely in Italian, but in many other languages as well, the use of the term "gender" is limited exclusively to the grammatical structure, rather than having that wider use which refers to those specific attributes assigned by every culture to the categories of "male" and "female", beginning with the social roles and their related patterns of behaviour. The term "sex", on the other hand, has various meanings, some of which refer to the biological fact while others to the cultural elaboration of this: an overlapping that has made the term highly ambiguous. It seems desirable to alter the use of the terms, using "sex" for those meanings related to the biological fact and "gender" for those which concern social roles and behaviours. This distinction may seem rather artificial but, for the moment, it will serve to clarify the discussion.

This conceptual confusion is proper to patriarchal culture, which has invoked anatomy to justify the social destiny of the genders. In this context, "male" and "female" appear as categories defined not by Culture but by Nature (8).

Surprisingly, these patriarchal conceptualisations are often used in the thinking on gender of some feminist trends. The definitions of "male" and "female" remain substantially unchanged, as do the pairings of Woman/Nature and Man/Culture. It is the attribution of value which is overturned and modified. The "male" is still the sphere of transcendence and objective rationality while the "female" is still the sphere of immanence and emotion, but the latter are endowed with a positive values. This unexpected triumph of the "eternal female essence" opens up the way for a questionable spiritualism with strong mystical tendencies. The two genders appear, yet again, to be at opposing poles and it is sex which determines their roles, behaviour and sensibility (9).

This view is partly a reaction to that classical feminism which confirmed the superiority of those categories that were defined as "male" and merely claimed the right to access for women to those categories from which they had formerly been excluded. This acceptance of "male" values later came to be seen as a threat of assimilation, which would have meant the disappearance of those "female" attributes which were now coming to be more highly regarded. It was no longer seen as necessary to abandon Nature, immanence and the private sphere for that of Culture, transcendence and the public sphere, but rather to emphasise those ties with Nature that are "the source of women's strength", to "realign the consciousness of the female Self with the laws of Nature", as it is from the latter that the female identity derives.

Although the two positions just outlined may seem opposed, they are in fact closely related, as both are still firmly inside that symbolic space which is defined by that seemingly irreducible opposition between Nature and Culture.

Our research should be aimed towards other and different conceptualisations and, more precisely, towards the attempt to define that particular synthesis of biological data and cultural capacity which constitutes human nature. I do not dare to attempt a definition at present, but prefer to say what it definitely is not: human nature is not the domination of transcendence over immanence, a domination which pretends to place the species (or to be more precise, half of it) beyond the limits of its materiality. Nor is it the realm of necessity in which the cosmic order determines human history. Nor, again, is it the dream of omnipotence nor the return to the "oceanic sentiment". An initial, very rough, definition in positive terms would be the affirmation that human nature represents the ability to choose from among certain given possibilities. It remains to be determined how many variables there are among the given possibilities and how extensive the ability to combine these is. Before attempting a more precise definition, however, we must create a new epistemological approach which will permit us to recompose human thought, a process which is essential to the elaboration of new categories defined in the light of new values.

We can now return to the question of how difference is seen in the present historical context. Patriarchal signification has left us an interpretation of difference in terms of inequality. It is now necessary to move outside the conceptual universe of hierarchical society and free the concept of difference from that of inequality. It is no longer sufficient, however, to put forward social equality as a solution to the problem, given that the concept of difference implies a multiformity which outweighs that of equality as it has been expressed in our culture.

In its philosophical sense, the idea of equality is deeply rooted in the anthropological structure of western thought. The fundamental assumption of western society (which could be defined more exactly as that of the representative democracies) is that every individual has an equal value in society, equal rights and equal access to political power in its delegated form. This is, obviously, the founding myth of western society and not its socio-political reality, but for the moment let us stay with the philosophical dimension. The very existence of this assumption means that every claim to equality (whether of the sexes, races, ethnic groups, age groups or others) is consistent with the reigning culture. This is not to say that it achieves immediate and painless application in society but only that the

demand is seen as legitimate. In this sense the demand for parity of the genders is a legitimate offspring of our era and our culture.

If we move from the philosophical to the social dimension, the situation becomes considerably more contradictory, given that we are faced with a society that is far from egalitarian and so must justify its hierarchical structure in the face of the assumed equality of all individuals. This it does, not by claiming some transcendent right, as it did in the past, but rather by reference to an immanent right justified by the functional necessities imposed by the management of a complex society like ours.

As far as the genders are concerned, this claim to equality has been culturally consistent, but has remained socially contradictory because it seeks a segmentary parity within a socially inegalitarian context. >From this point of view a certain (very influential) part of feminism has been a factor of integration in the society of domination, by proposing the upward sliding of the female semi-pyramid along the vertical axis of society to a position equal to that of the male semi-pyramid, without altering the overall hierarchical structure.

This push for integration has also been combined with a degree of flexibility in the western system, where the inequality between genders has lost its transcendental legitimation, but has not yet developed consistent functional reasons to maintain this inequality, at least in its absolute form. We will see later how and why this phenomenon has arisen. While many social and symbolic spaces are still marked by this specific inequality, western society no longer claims that it is structurally necessary to its survival and is now accepting a noticeable, although slow and contradictory, absorption of this segmentary parity. In order to better understand this weakening of gender discrimination (in favour of other criteria to which we will return) we must widen our scope to include the planetary control that has been put in effect by western society: only if we keep in mind this more general outlook, do its internal dynamics become more understandable. I am referring in particular to that North/South division of the world, in which a rich and democratic North can allow itself a considerable internal flexibility. It can actually absorb a certain degree of social equality and generalised well-being, by passing the negative effects of this process on to an economically and culturally subordinate South, therefore re-establishing the functional necessities of the hierarchical society on a world level. As libertarian feminists have understood, there is no radical solution to the man/woman inequality without the whole principle of hierarchy being brought into question (10).

There is another reason why the concept of equality is insufficient to express the multiformity implied by the concept of difference. It in fact postulates an absolute parity in front of the Rule, which leaves us with a static image of social power. In reality, power is a dynamic function which circulates among the various subjects, producing a series of transitory asymmetries which cut across the social and symbolic life of the individual, of the gender, of age groups, etc. and which also affect other basic concepts such as *authority* and *influence* (11).

In hierarchical society, many of these transitory asymmetries become permanent, creating a constant disequilibrium of some social groups. The institutionalisation of these asymmetries ruptures the actual symmetry of those societies that are not organised along hierarchical principles, a symmetry which results from taking

into consideration all the social functions carried out by each individual in the course of his/her life (12).

The concept of equivalence that results from this social vision seems to me more adequate to the dynamic character that we have attributed to power, permitting a much greater social multiformity which does not transform transitory asymmetries into permanent hierarchies.

Our critique of the logic of domination, with its stress on uniformity and simplification, should include - as Barbara McClintock suggested - a reevaluation of "aberration". This should not be seen as the exception that proves the rule, but rather as an element of reality that has its own meaning and value and that should therefore be included in the understanding of the world. The reevaluation of the "abnormal" (using normal in its statistical meaning of "maximum frequency" and not in the ethical sense of "right") and of deviance (no longer considered as disorder but as a legitimate expression of social diversity) will allow us to see difference as a given and as a value not only between the genders but also within them, rejecting that false universalism postulated by gender stereotypes. This brings us to a number of considerations on the ethics (and aesthetics) of difference.

The starting point is that need for identity which is a necessitating factor in the construction of Self: it is the need to define it, to emerge from the "oceanic sentiment", to affirm one's uniqueness. In the process of symbolic codification that accompanies the appearance of the One (both in the species and in the individual), the first inescapable difference encountered in Nature and applied to society is the sexual one, which when assumed and mediated by Culture, gives rise to the birth of gender. It is the first major systematisation of the world (13). The recognition of sexual difference is, therefore, a universal feature of human culture, albeit in a multiplicity of forms.

In patriarchal cultures, the construction of the male identity seems a rather traumatic process as it requires the denial of the primary identification, which is generally that with the mother; it thus marks an extreme and excruciating differentiation from the female. The construction of the female identity seems, on the other hand, to maintain a basic continuity (14).

It is possible to see this traumatic rupture as the source of that fear of the undifferentiated which is so typical of our culture. As Serge Moscovici stresses, it results in "that never-resting intolerance of difference, a passion which feeds our thought and which has led to the elimination of anything that does not reflect our identity". This fear has, however, contradictorily led to an over-stressed difference between the genders, on one hand, and a stereotyped uniformity within the genders on the other, enormously reducing the legitimate combinations of human variability in so doing.

In this context, the need for gender identity presents itself as an extreme fear of androgyny, a spectre which has traditionally been present in the male sphere. The myth of androgyny represents the desire for a re-union of the "male" and the "female", two identities which were originally united and, having been violently separated into two autonomous entities, are seeking each other in an irresistible and never-satisfied reciprocal attraction. The tension towards re-union has been interpreted (by some feminists as well) as a danger of reassimilation, which would mean the disappearance of gender identity; the spectre of androgyny therefore arouses a fear of the undifferentiated. Little importance is placed,

however, on the fact that this reciprocal attraction arises from an "archaic memory" shared by the two entities, from a feeling of unity in diversity, all of which constitute the basis for another fundamental identity: that of the species (15).

The first and more restrictive understanding of the myth of androgyny has been put forward again in feminist culture. The fear of the undifferentiated has been carried to the extreme so creating a "mystique of difference" which reproduces rigid and bipolar models of genders. It is rather astonishing that this mystical approach to difference has generally ignored that lack of differentiation peculiar to gender stereotypes, without questioning that actual cultural cloning which has sought to legitimise only two models of humanity: spectres that should give rise to an equal fear. In fact, deviance and aberration should become values within gender consciousness as well: a fundamental but not unique identity in the construction of Self.

This brings us to the question of identifying those variables which, in our cultural context, combine in the formation of Self; those fundamental identifications which assume a central importance within our culture. It seems to me that these elements are identifiable in the triad of individual/gender/species. It is now necessary not only to reinterpret these categories in the light of a positive signification of difference, but also to redefine their relationship, bearing in mind that they are cultural constructions, whose combination is not necessarily given a priori but is the result of a certain cultural history.

This reconsideration must begin by removing the individual from that cultural cloning caused by the gender bipolarity, and representing it instead as the sphere of extreme multiformity, of multiple and irrepeateable combinations, a point of arrival at which the many social and human variables meet and combine in a unique way. And it is on this level that, in abandoning the gender bipolarity, we gain the sphere of the neuter (16), which is the absence of gender connotations that, far from giving rise to any fear of the undifferentiated, appears as a realm to discover and build, where the key to understanding is not the difference between genders but rather difference pure and simple.

This is not to deny that gender is a fundamental element in the construction of Self: it in fact acts as an essential mediator in the dialectic individual/species (generally an hidden mediator in our culture). But it is not the only element, nor the only paradigm that may give signification to a much more complex social and symbolic space.

In this space we must seek to reinvent an image of species far from that cleft view that we have inherited from the patriarchal culture. We need a much wider concept around which we can build the sphere of the human. A human no longer colonised by the "male" presenting itself as universal, but rather advocating a unity in diversity, in which both genders and individuals can fully identify themselves; a human which will no longer see itself as the antithesis of a totally extraneous Nature. On the contrary, this will be a sphere of common feeling, of the "archaic memory", which legitimises difference on the basis of a strong sense of identity.

It is only if a common ethical view develops within this sphere that difference will be able to realise itself fully without the risk of becoming transformed into incomprehension and fear of the Other along its social and symbolic paths.

It will then be possible to postulate an aesthetic of difference carried to its extreme consequences: the triumph of multiformity. The more the species shares common values, the more the genders and individuals will be able to construct differentiated imaginaries and modalities. In this way languages, gestures, eroticism, emotions and the whole body language will make up that privileged sphere in which it will be possible to experiment and to celebrate human creativity.

Let us see if we can draw some conclusions from what has been said above, seeking a better definition of that difference with which we are concerned.

My first conclusion is that it seems essential to abandon the conceptualisations of "male" and "female" that have been generally accepted up to now.

Notwithstanding the wide range of approaches and aims, they have all been developed inside a system of dichotomic thinking. This recomposition of thought that we have made a central priority will allow us to abandon these opposed and irreconcilable categories (17) and to redefine them in line with a positive signification of the concepts of diversity and multiplicity. It is therefore necessary to abandon the idea that "male" and "female" are ontological categories, that is to say, categories which transcend history and culture. "Male" and "female" are in fact cultural constructions that each society develops on the basis of its own interpretation of the world.

The second conclusion (which was suggested at the outset) is that biological difference, while it may determine certain functions, does not determine the social roles attributed to these. The fact of having male or female sexual attributes is not in itself significant, but takes on a certain significance within each cultural context. However, it is this very "locus" which is referred to in the attempt to justify choice with necessity and transcendence with immanence .

Now, it is obvious that the biological difference inescapably and irreducibly exists (although biogenetic engineering has brought the boundaries of this irreducibility into doubt). However, we must at the same time admit that we can only perceive the biological difference through its representation (clearly arbitrary!), as the very process of knowing implies the bestowal of significance at the same moment in which a fact becomes known. Without this cultural interpretation the biological fact would remain "mute" for the human species, as its perception is always mediated by the symbolic code of the latter. Nor can we believe that it is possible to give a "voice" to the biological fact, "letting Nature speak for itself": Nature always speaks to us giving back those meanings that we have projected on it, at a conscious or unconscious level.

It is certainly a short step from this centrality in the cognitive process to that arrogant anthropocentric (or better androcentric) conception that has marked western culture. But this step is far from inevitable if, at the same time, we develop values which are foreign to that dream of omnipotence that has pervaded our culture. To be the centre of the cognitive process does not necessarily mean to be transformed into the Subject at the centre of an otherwise inexistent reality: if this reality cannot be comprehensible unless we pass from Chaos to Cosmos, at the end of this process we do not have necessarily to find God.

Sex therefore imbues gender but does not determine it (18). And that brings us to that human nature (alternatively described as totally determined by nature or totally by culture) which we have seen to be the result of the interrelations between the biological fact, which provides its weft (19), and that freedom of

choice provided by culture, which works on the former to trace the thousand forms of the social realm.

Let us return to the claim that "male" and "female" are cultural constructions developed by every society on the basis of its own interpretation of the world. These constructions are principally formed around the roles that each society assigns to the genders and which are the source of those particular attitudes, feelings, behaviour and sensibility that contribute to form the gender identity. The division of labour in society has therefore been fundamental in the development of gender just as it has for the very existence of society.

There is no room here for an exhaustive discussion on the importance of the "sexual contract" and of the symbolic relationship that permeates this (20). Nor is this the place to consider the hypothesis that the attribution of certain fundamental roles to the genders (principally those which are tied to biological functions) derives from a cultural imitation of the animal world (21). For the present we will focus purely on the process of socialisation, aimed at developing the abilities called for by these specific roles, which has moved progressively towards a rigidity of the division and the associated gender attributes, becoming, over time, that cultural selection responsible for the cloning process already mentioned. By bringing the areas of competence of the respective genders to a point of extreme specialisation and operating according to a criterion of exclusion, this socialisation has made them progressively foreign to one another. While on the one hand society organises itself on the basis of that social division of labour, at the same time it is losing a great deal of flexibility because of this rigid and specialised socialisation.

However, it is not necessary to hypothesise the disappearance of differentiated roles as the antidote for that social and symbolic inequality which marks patriarchal culture (even though the abandonment of the "sexual contract" which divides the whole society into the "male" and the "female" may be desirable). Differentiation is both possible and desirable, as long as it is based on criteria other than the bipolar logic of domination, which transforms a division of roles into a hierarchy of roles. Rather, it is necessary to move towards a criterion of social and symbolic equivalence which may permit a much wider differentiation, while retaining certain specific roles around which the genders can construct their own images.

To identify what these roles could be today is too long a task to undertake here. For the moment it is sufficient to point out that there are no "naturally" male or female roles, but that these are determined on the basis of the needs and desires specific to every culture. The gender division of labour need not extend throughout the whole society but has to interweave with other categories, such as those of individual and species, neuter and human.

In this more open and dynamic vision of society, the criteria of socialisation too would have to adapt to its multi-faceted nature, changing from a rigid and specialised cultural selection to a complex and interrelated socialisation which would allow each individual to experiment with a number of roles through the course of his/her life. This opening up of options already seems to be taking place in western society. In fact, the factors which have given rise to this process and the direction it has taken are in response to totally different demands.

Our society is in fact undergoing a process of restructuring which is having an effect throughout the planet and is noticeably modifying the roles of the genders

as well. The female roles in particular are undergoing a radical transformation (eased by birth control) which is opening up a whole new range of options to women, unthinkable some decades ago. Many of the traditional roles (such as the upbringing and socialisation of children, the care of the sick and aged, the management of the family dwelling and so on) have been progressively taken over by the State, which has enormously increased its control of the private sphere, with an intrusion of the "public" into areas in which it was previously virtually or totally absent (22).

The weakening of traditional roles (which has affected the various social classes and categories in different ways) has not, however, produced other specific roles around which the female gender can construct its new image. As Ivan Illich points out, this weakening of roles has brought about a weakening of gender identity in favour of a unisex culture, of a largely male stamp, which has reawakened the spectre of androgyny in its narrowest sense.

This phenomenon is not affecting the genders alone but it is part of a more general process towards cultural homologation carried out by the rarefied and pervasive domination of our era. This process, aimed at restructuring the internal dynamics of the social pyramid, is also establishing different criteria of selection which meet the needs of such parameters as cultural compatibility and functional efficiency (23).

Furthermore, this emerging unisex culture, while apparently favouring male attributes and values at the expense of female ones, is in fact causing a weakening of the male identity as well, as it sees that specificity around which its image is constructed being expropriated and those features which were previously unequivocally its own being redistributed between the genders. This remixing of traditional gender images, this weakening of identity, has brought with it a degree of social uncertainty which favours the process towards homologation. In this context some differences may acquire new significations while progressively losing the traditional ones (and so permitting that segmentary parity of which we have already spoken), but the overall result will inevitably be a penalization of difference, seen as disorder, and its positioning along a hierarchical axis. The process under way at present is therefore working against that desire for diversity, multiplicity and complexity which marks our signification of difference.

The task of culture is not therefore to "order" a natural multiformity (described as chaotic and senseless) reducing reality to hierarchical models. We must abandon this conceptual universe and find new signification for order and disorder, norm and deviance, in the light of other values which refer to the culture of complexity, of interrelationship rather than uni-directional control. In this context multiformity will no longer be the expression of disorder (artificially created by the predominance of a Rule to which everything must conform) but will seem both necessary and desirable.

The task of culture is therefore to give both value and meaning to this multiformity which, far from being potentially dangerous, is in fact physiologically necessary to its very functioning: culture would have no reason to exist in a reality reduced to uniformity. It must, therefore not only include difference in its universe and transform it from fact into value, but can and must *invent* the difference. This is the "locus" in which another irreducibility of difference lies: the sphere of the cultural plasticity of our species, which is capable of reproducing multiformity, the sphere of the creative imagination,

which is capable of inventing new forms. It is thanks to this human ability to create its own social imagery that the emerging non-hierarchical culture will be able to redefine the categories of male and female on the basis of its own interpretation of the world, formulating roles, behavioural patterns and sensibilities that meet its own needs and desires. Two new images will be created, certainly not in a vacuum but latching on to already existing forms and yet marking an irreversible rupture with the myths that have until then given them significance and that will, at last, lose their enchantment.

NOTES

1. At the same time that I declare my prevailing "culturalist" approach, I must still confess that I have some doubts about such a distinct choice. This is not because of any temptation towards biodeterminism (that is the attempt to explain social behaviour in terms of genetic determinations) but because of the emergence of a more complex approach to biology (as for example that of Henri Laborit) which deserves much greater consideration than the gross over-simplifications of sociobiology.
2. It is important to stress that the present discussion is developed within the context of western culture. It is necessary to state this because the western model (even in discussion on gender) is far too often taken, more or less consciously, as the universal one. This mistaken perspective has clearly marked the anthropological outlook of feminism (particularly in its early period) producing two models of "male" and "female" which often seem to be deprived of their historical context and are put forward as absolute models, unable to express a much more complex and varied human reality.
3. While it is true that myths cannot be "objectified", it is also true that they can outlive their 'function', losing their enchantment and suddenly seeming bare. This loss of enchantment allows us to reconsider and 'objectify' them in the light of other myths operating in the unconscious.
4. It is clear that we are faced with stereotypes that over-simplify reality. As Evelyn Fox Keller points out, not all men are scientists, although science is the product of a subsystem that is peculiar to the human species (men) but also to a certain race (whites) and to a certain class (upper-middle).
5. The cerebral structure itself (common throughout the species) bears witness to the simultaneous and complementary presence of intuitive and creative mental processes responding to the right hemisphere of the brain (which is responsible for the production of images) and the logical, sequential and analytic mental processes responding to the left hemisphere of the brain (which controls language).
6. I am referring in particular to the theoretical contribution of Murray Bookchin in his fundamental book *The Ecology of Freedom* (Cheshire Books, 1982).

7. I do not wish to enter here into the discussion of which was the original division. I prefer to stress the fundamental importance of the three elements and their concomitance, which does not imply that they appeared simultaneously but that they intersected at a certain point in human history, thereby producing the patriarchal society.

8. For a further discussion of this biodeterminist formulation, see my article *The Source of Nile: a Search for the Origins of Male Domination* ("Volonta", 3/1983), published in English in "Our Generation" (vol. 19, no.1, 1987, Montreal, Canada).

9. Here I am referring in particular to those currents which are defined in North-America as "cultural" and "radical" feminism.

10. The pressure towards egalitarianism expressed in the concept of sisterhood that was formulated by early feminism, had a radically subversive character. As it was, however, expressed in extremely decontextualized terms (without taking into account the enormous social differences that cut across the female semi-pyramid) it has progressively lost its force in the face of persistent social and cultural inequalities. Remaining however as a founding myth, the idea of sisterhood outlived as a claim to a common identity (trans-historical and trans-cultural) which would include all women, regardless of class, ethnic group or knowledge... inequalities which would all be absorbed and reconciled within this collective identity.

11. For an extensive definition of these categories (including power and domination) see the article by Amedeo Bertolo, *Power, Authority and Domination: A Proposed Definition* ("Volonta", 2/1983, published in English in the collection *Thinking as Anarchists*). From this essay I have taken the following quote: "I have identified four conceptual categories from current colloquial and scientific language, which are or could be covered by a single term: *power*. I have proposed that this term be retained purely for the first of these categories: the social regulatory function, that is to say, the totality of those processes by which a society regulates itself, producing and applying norms and ensuring that they are respected. If this function is the prerogative of one particular sector of society, if power is the monopoly of a privileged (dominant) sector of society, this produces another category - the totality of hierarchical relationship based on command/obedience - which I proposed we term *domination*. Finally I suggest that the term *authority* be used to describe those asymmetries of competence that determine reciprocal asymmetries of determination between individuals and influence to describe the asymmetries attributable to personal characteristics".

12. In speaking of societies without domination I am referring to specific societies that do or have existed (for example, hunting and gathering tribes such as the Nuer, the Pygmies and the Bushmen). There is no idea, however, of suggesting that an ideal society in which those values of freedom and equality, consistent with our anthropological outlook, can be found. We must certainly avoid projecting our imaginary structures onto these other societies interpreting them on the basis of criteria that are foreign to them. The aim is rather to highlight those signs which allow us to hypothesise not an absolute model of diversity but a

social and symbolic multiformity which denies the self-claimed universality of domination.

13. According to R. Stoller, the new-born infant immediately becomes part of gender signification and the consciousness of belonging to one gender or the other is irreversibly formed during the first three years of life. The exceptions are those transsexuals and intersexuals whose attribution of gender during this early phase was not undisputed (even if reversed).

14. This continuity in the construction of the female identity does not exclude other traumatic ruptures, such as the interiorizing of the negative value placed on the female gender.

15. The American writer Ursula Le Guin has created a fascinating model of androgyny in her work *The Left Hand of Darkness*, in which every individual alternates in the course of a lifetime between a female and a male identity (different but not opposed), through both of which flows an ancestral sense of humanity.

16. Stroller's studies of individuals with neuter chromosome structures, defined as intersexuals, are of great interest. In a society founded on sexual bipolarism, these individuals are constrained to construct their identity to fit into one of the two legitimate models, with greater or lesser success. In this way our culture has denied to a specific form of diversity the opportunity to express itself in ways and forms that could give rise to a different human identity, outside the conventionally accepted bipolarism.

17. I am not postulating a complementarity between the genders which would exclude conflict in favour of an abstractly harmonious vision. However that ontological incompatibility outlined by certain feminist currents, which presupposes a conflict between the genders that is not a product of a socio-cultural context, but exists *per se* in the dialectic between two opposing essences, is equally unacceptable.

18. It is quite feasible to claim the opposite if we consider those not uncommon cases in which individuals with well-defined sexual characteristics nonetheless develop a sense of gender that contradicts their sexual make-up. This phenomenon is seen in transsexuality - that is to say, the desire to change one's anatomy to conform with a cultural identification with the opposite gender and also in those cases of a consciously reversed socialisation (as for example can be seen among the Inuit) that has produced perfectly integrated members of the adopted gender.

19. This weft, in contradiction to a reductive view of the biological, is no longer seen as unmodifiable by definition. Nature is in fact continually transforming itself, particularly in response to the interrelationship with the cultural. The development of the human brain is probably the clearest example of this.

20. This pact not only marks the birth of the genders as social subjects but also marks a significant moment in the development of a more complex society. Such a 'contract' is based on the reciprocal recognition of the importance of both genders for the existence of human society. But in the same moment that this relationship of complementarity is founded, society takes on a divided configuration, with a "male" and a "female" which are certainly complementary, but also more and more foreign to one another. These premises consequently facilitate the passage from duality to dichotomy.

21. I am referring in particular to those genetically determined sexual attributions which are present in the primates most closely related to the human species. It is possible that such models of social behaviour among animals - although there is no space here to consider whether this behaviour is purely instinctual or whether it too is in some way in response to cultural stimuli - were reproduced by the human species when the collapse of their own instinctual responses had left a void to be immediately filled by other cultural forms; forms which did not arise out of a vacuum but were produced around a close relationship with the environment. The forms of behaviour that could be seen in nature may well have seemed powerfully obvious to the human species, which thus transformed these biological functions into social roles.

22. This is not to imply that this emancipation is to be condemned, but it is necessary to include this process in a wider social and cultural context that permits us to understand and evaluate it more fully. Nor is this to imply that the private realm has escaped the hierarchical logic, but rather that its marginality has

permitted the unfolding of a gender consciousness and behaviour that the subsequent increasing control of the State has largely annulled.

23. Integrating that fundamental assumption of anarchist theory, which has identified in the division between manual and intellectual labour one of the bases of the modern hierarchical system, the difference between significant and marginal knowledge is now becoming an essential criterion for understanding the dynamics of this restructuring. As far as the discussion on gender is concerned, women are no longer barred from significant knowledge (at least not in a institutional form, although the influence of the deep imaginary structures are certainly more ambiguous). In fact, notwithstanding the resistance interposed by every society to transformation (and always bearing in mind the vertical disparities in society), women are being granted ever wider access to this knowledge.