

THE BONDS OF LOVE

*PSYCHOANALYSIS, FEMINISM, AND THE
PROBLEM OF DOMINATION*

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tion in internal rhythms; later, there is alternation between the oneness of harmonious attunement and the "two-ness" of disengagement.

But why has the dualistic view of the individual enjoyed plausibility for so long? Why does the idea of the linear movement toward separation, of the construction of the psyche in terms of the internalization of objects ring so true? Perhaps it is because this conception of the individual reflects a powerful experience—whose origins we have discovered in the rapprochement conflict—the experience of paradox as painful, or even intolerable. Perhaps, also, because of a continuing fear that dependency on the other is a threat to independence, that recognition of the other compromises the self. When the conflict between dependence and independence becomes too intense, the psyche gives up the paradox in favor of an opposition. Polarity, the conflict of opposites, replaces the balance within the self. This polarity sets the stage for defining the self in terms of a movement away from dependency.

It also sets the stage for domination. Opposites can no longer be integrated; one side is devalued, the other idealized (splitting). In this chapter we have concentrated on infancy, on the shifts in the balance of assertion and recognition at the earliest moments in the self-other relationship. We have seen how a crisis arises as differentiation proceeds and recognition of otherness confronts the self with a momentous paradox. In the following chapters we shall analyze how this inability to sustain the tension of paradox manifests itself in all forms of domination, and why this occurs.

We shall begin by following the breakdown of tension into its adult form, erotic domination and submission.

C H A P T E R T W O

Master and Slave

IN THE POST-FREUDIAN world it is commonplace to assume that the foundations of erotic life lie in infancy. This means that adult sexual love is not only shaped by the events dating from that period of intense intimacy and dependency, it is also an opportunity to reenact and work out the conflicts that began there. Where the site of control and abandon is the body, the demands of the infant self are most visible—and so is the shift from differentiation to domination. In sadomaso-

chistic fantasies and relationships we can discern the "pure culture" of domination—a dynamic which organizes both domination and submission.

The fantasy of erotic domination embodies both the desire for independence and the desire for recognition. This inquiry intends to understand the process of alienation whereby these desires are transformed into erotic violence and submission. What we shall see, especially in voluntary submission to erotic domination, is a paradox in which the individual tries to achieve freedom through slavery, release through submission to control. Once we understand submission to be the *desire* of the dominated as well as their helpless fate, we may hope to answer the central question, How is domination anchored in the hearts of those who submit to it?

DOMINATION AND DIFFERENTIATION

Domination begins with the attempt to deny dependency. No one can truly extricate himself from dependency on others, from the need for recognition. In the first relationship of dependency, between child and parent, this is an especially painful and paradoxical lesson. A child must come to terms with the fact that he does not magically control the mother, and that what she does for him is subject to her, not his, will. The paradox is that the child not only needs to achieve independence, but he must be recognized as independent—by the very people on whom he has been most dependent.

As we have seen in chapter 1, much can go amiss at this point. If, for example, the child is unable to relinquish the fantasy of omnipotence, he may be tempted to believe that he can become independent without recognizing the other person. ("I will continue to believe that mother is my servant, a genie who fulfills my wishes and does as I command, an extension of my will"). The child may be tempted to believe that the other person is not separate. ("She belongs to me, I control and possess her.") In short, he fails to confront his own dependency on someone outside himself. Alternatively, the child may

continue to see the mother as all-powerful, and himself as helpless. In this case, the apparent acceptance of dependency masks the effort to retain control by remaining connected to the mother ("I am good and powerful because I am exactly like my good and powerful mother wishes me to be"). This child does not believe he will ever gain recognition for his own independent self, and so he denies that self.

In my discussion of infancy, I have already demonstrated that the balance *within* the self depends upon mutual recognition *between* self and other. And mutual recognition is perhaps the most vulnerable point in the process of differentiation. In Hegel's notion of recognition, the self requires the opportunity to act and have an effect on the other to affirm his existence. In order to exist for oneself, one has to exist for an other. It would seem there is no way out of this dependency. If I destroy the other, there is no one to recognize me, for if I allow him no independent consciousness, I become enmeshed with a dead, not-conscious being. If the other denies me recognition, my acts have no meaning; if he is so far above me that nothing I do can alter his attitude toward me, I can only submit. My desire and agency can find no outlet, except in the form of obedience.

We might call this the dialectic of control: If I completely control the other, then the other ceases to exist, and if the other completely controls me, then I cease to exist. A condition of our own independent existence is recognizing the other. True independence means sustaining the essential tension of these contradictory impulses; that is, both asserting the self and recognizing the other. Domination is the consequence of refusing this condition.

In mutual recognition the subject accepts the premise that others are separate but nonetheless share like feelings and intentions. The subject is compensated for his loss of sovereignty by the pleasure of sharing, the communion with another subject. But for Hegel, as for Freud, the breakdown of essential tension is inevitable. The hypothetical self presented by Hegel and Freud does not *want* to recognize the other, does not perceive him as a person just like himself. He gives up omnipotence only when he has no other choice. His need for the

other—in Freud, physiological, in Hegel, existential—seems to place him in the other's power, as if dependency were the equivalent of surrender. When the subject abandons the project of absolute independence or control, he does so unwillingly, with a persistent, if unconscious, wish to fulfill the old omnipotence fantasy.¹ This is a far cry from actually appreciating the other as a being in his or her own right.

Since the subject cannot accept his dependency on someone he cannot control, the solution is to subjugate and enslave the other—to make him give that recognition without recognizing him in return. The primary consequence of the inability to reconcile dependence with independence, then, is the transformation of need for the other into domination of him.

For Freud and Hegel this is precisely what happens in the "state of nature." In Freud's terms, aggression and the desire for mastery—necessary derivatives of the death instinct—are part of our nature. Without the restraint of civilization, whoever is more powerful will subjugate the other. The wish to restore early omnipotence, or to realize the fantasy of control, never ceases to motivate the individual. In Hegel's terms, self-consciousness wants to be absolute. It wants to be recognized by the other in order to place itself in the world and make itself the whole world. The I wants to prove itself at the expense of the other; it wants to think itself the only one; it abjures dependency. Since each self raises the same claim, the two must struggle to the death for recognition. For Hegel this struggle does not culminate in the survival of each for the other, in mutual recognition. Rather, the stronger makes the other his slave.

But this viewpoint would imply that submission is simply the hard lot of the weak.² And indeed, the question of why the oppressed submit is never fully explained. Yet the question of submission is implicitly raised by Hegel and Freud, who see that the slave must grant power of recognition to the master. To understand this side of the relationship of domination, we must turn to an account written from the point of view of one who submits.

THE FANTASY OF EROTIC DOMINATION

Sadomasochistic fantasy, the most common form of erotic domination, replicates quite faithfully the themes of the master-slave relationship. Here subjugation takes the form of transgressing against the other's body, violating his physical boundaries. The act of violation of the body becomes a way of representing the struggle to the death for recognition. Ritual violation is a form of risking the psychological, if not the physical, self.

I have based my analysis of sadomasochistic fantasy on a single, powerful study of the erotic imagination, Pauline Réage's *Story of O*. Réage's tale is a web in which the issues of dependency and domination are inextricably intertwined, in which the conflict between the desire for autonomy and the desire for recognition can only be resolved by total renunciation of self. It illustrates powerfully the principle that the root of domination lies in the breakdown of tension between self and other.

Perhaps the greatest objection to this work by feminists has been directed against its depiction of O's voluntary submission. For them, the account of O's masochism is not an allegory of the desire for recognition, but simply the story of a victimized woman, too weak or brainwashed or hopeless to resist her degradation.³ Such a viewpoint cannot, of course, explain what satisfaction is sought and found in submission, what psychological motivations lead to oppression, humiliation, and subservience. It denies the unpleasant fact that people really do consent to relationships of domination, and that fantasies of domination play a vigorous part in the mental lives of many who do not actually do so.

Story of O confronts us boldly with the idea that people often submit not merely out of fear, but in complicity with their own deepest desires. Told from the point of view of the woman who submits, and representing, as it does, the fantasy life of a gifted woman writer,⁴ the story compels the reader to accept the authenticity of the

desire for submission. But the narrative also makes clear that the desire for submission represents a peculiar transposition of the desire for recognition. O's physical humiliation and abuse represent a search for an elusive spiritual or psychological satisfaction. Her masochism is a search for recognition through an other who is powerful enough to bestow this recognition. This other has the power for which the self longs, and through his recognition she gains it, though vicariously.

At the beginning of *Story of O*, the heroine is, without warning, brought by her lover to Roissy Castle, an establishment organized by men for the ritual violation and subjugation of women. There she is given specific instructions:

You are here to serve your masters. . . . At the first word or sign from anyone you will drop whatever you are doing and ready yourself for what is really your one and only duty: to lend yourself. Your hands are not your own, nor are your breasts, nor most especially, any of your orifices, which we may explore or penetrate at will. . . . You have lost all right to privacy or concealment . . . you must never look any of us in the face. If the costume we wear . . . leaves our sex exposed, it is not for the sake of convenience . . . but for the sake of insolence, so your eyes will be directed there upon it and nowhere else so that you may learn that there resides your master. . . . [Your] being whipped . . . is less for our pleasure than for your enlightenment. . . . Both this flogging and the chain attached to the ring of your collar . . . are intended less to make you suffer, scream or shed tears than to make you feel, through this suffering, that you are not free but fettered, and to teach you that you are totally dedicated to something outside yourself.⁵

A great deal is contained in these several lines. First, O is to lose all subjectivity, all possibility of using her body for action; she is to be merely a thing. Second, she is to be continually violated, even when

she is not actually being used. The main transgression of her boundaries consists of her having to be always available and open. Third, her masters are to be recognized by her in an indirect form. The penis represents their desire, and through this indirect representation they will maintain their sovereignty. By interposing it between her and them they establish a subjectivity that is distanced, independent of her recognition. Indeed, they claim that their abuse of her is more for her "enlightenment" than their pleasure, so that even in using her they do not appear to need her. Their acts are carefully controlled: each act has a goal that expresses their rational intentions. Their sadistic pleasure consists not in direct enjoyment of her pain, but in the knowledge of their power over her—the fact that their power is visible, that it is manifested by outward signs, that it leaves marks.

Why must they find enjoyment more in their command than in her service, and why must it be distanced, that is, symbolized by the penis? Because in order to maintain their separate subjectivity, they must scrupulously deny their dependency on her. Otherwise they would suffer the fate of Hegel's master, who, in becoming dependent on his slave, gradually loses subjectivity to him. A further danger for the master is that the subject always becomes the object he consumes. By negating her will, they turn her into an object. And when her objectification is complete, when she has no more will, they can no longer use her without becoming filled with her thing-like nature. Thus they must perform their violation rationally and ritually in order to maintain their boundaries and to make her will—not only her body—the object of their will.

Finally, the symbolization of male mastery through the penis emphasizes the difference between them and her. It signifies the denial of commonality that gives them the right to violate her. Each act the master takes against O establishes his separateness, his difference from her. He continually places himself outside her by saying, in effect, "I am not you." The rational function (calculation, objectivity, and control) is linked to this distance. The penis symbolizes the master's

resistance to being absorbed by the thing he is controlling; however interdependent the master and slave may become, the difference between them will be sustained.

The story is driven forward by the dialectic of control. Since a slave who is completely dominated loses the quality of being able to give recognition, the struggle to possess her must be prolonged. O must be enslaved piece by piece; new levels of resistance must be found, so that she can be vanquished anew—She must acquiesce in ever deeper humiliation, pain, and bondage, and she must will her submission ever anew, each time her masters ask her, “O, do you consent?” The narrative moves through these ever deeper levels of submission, tracing the impact of each fresh negation of her will, each new defeat of her resistance.

The culmination of the dialectic, the point when O has submitted and René, her lover, has exhausted the possibilities of violating her, would, logically, present a narrative problem. But before the problem can arise, before René becomes bored with O’s submission and she is used up and discarded, a new source of tension is introduced. One day René presents O to Sir Stephen, his older (and more powerful) stepbrother, to whom she is to be “given.” Unlike René, Sir Stephen does not love O. He is described as having a “will of ice and iron, which would not be swayed by desire,” and he demands that she obey him without loving him, and without his loving her.⁶ Yet this more complete surrender of her person and acceptance of her object status further arouses O’s desire, makes her wish to matter in some way, to “exist for him.” Sir Stephen finds new ways of intensifying O’s bondage: he employs her to entice another woman; he sends her to another castle, Samois, where O will abuse and be abused by other women; and he makes her “more interesting” by having her branded and her anus enlarged. These measures make Sir Stephen’s form of mastery even more rational, calculating, and self-controlled than René’s—more fully independent of his slave.

Furthermore, the fact that René looks up to Sir Stephen as to a father suggests that he is the loved authority not only for O, but also

for René. He is the person in whose eyes René wants to be recognized; giving Sir Stephen his lover is a form of “obedience,” and René is obviously “pleased that [Sir Stephen] deigned to take pleasure in something he had given him.” Indeed, O realizes that the two men share something “mysterious . . . more acute, more intense than amorous communion” from which she is excluded, even though she is the medium for it. René’s delivery of O to Sir Stephen is a way of surrendering himself sexually to the more powerful man. “What each of them would look for in her would be the other’s mark, the trace of the other’s passage.” Indeed, for René, Sir Stephen’s possession of O sanctifies her, leaving “the mark of a god.”⁷

René’s relationship with Sir Stephen calls for a reinterpretation of the story up to this point: we now see that the objectification of the woman is inspired both by the need to assert difference from her, and by the desire to gain prestige in the father’s eyes. Thus René begins to relinquish his love for O, the tender and compassionate identification that moved him when she first surrendered, for the sake of his identification and alliance with the father. We might say that the desire for recognition by the father wholly overtakes the love of the mother; it becomes another motive for domination. (This shift in allegiance shows how the roots of domination lie not only in the preoedipal drama of mother and child, but also in the oedipal triad, as chapter 4 will discuss in detail). O’s unimportance to either man by comparison with their bond to each other becomes a further aspect of her humiliation and negation.

Despite the narrative’s attempt to create more dramatic tension, the story eventually becomes heavy with O’s inexorable loss of subjectivity. Playing the complementary part to her masters, O relinquishes all sense of difference and separateness in order to remain—at all costs—connected to them. O’s deepest fears of abandonment and separation emerge as her tie to René is gradually dissolved by her bondage to Sir Stephen. Briefly left alone, she begins to believe she has lost René’s love; she feels that her life is absolutely void. She thinks, paraphrasing a Protestant text she had seen as a child, “It is a fearful thing to be

cast out of the hands of the living God." O is the lost soul who can only be restored to grace by putting herself in the hands of the ideal, omnipotent other.

As the story continues, O's desire for connection increasingly assumes the symbolic and ritual character of a devotion: now it is her task to live according to her new lover's will, to serve him whether he is present or not. Her lover is like a god, and her need for him can only be satisfied by obedience, which allows her to transcend herself by becoming an instrument of his supreme will. In this way, O's story, with its themes of devotion and transcendence, is suggestive of the surrender of the saints. The torture and outrage to which she submits is a kind of martyrdom, seeming "to her the very redemption of her sins."⁸ O's great longing is to be *known*, and in this respect she is like any lover, for the secret of love is to be known as oneself. But her desire to be known is like that of the sinner who wants to be known by God. Sir Stephen thrills her because he knows her instantly; he knows her to be bad, wanton, reveling in her debasement. However, this knowing can only go so far, because there is progressively less of O the subject left to be known.

Story of O concludes with a note that proposes two possible endings to the story. In the first, Sir Stephen returns O to Roissy and abandons her there. In the second, O, "seeing that Sir Stephen was about to leave her, said she would prefer to die. Sir Stephen gave her his consent." This is her final gesture of heroism, her last opportunity to express her lover's will. The gesture is in keeping with O's paradoxical hope that in complete surrender she will find her elusive self. For this hope is the other side of O's devotional servitude: in performing the tasks her masters set her, O seeks affirmation of herself. O is actually willing to risk complete annihilation of her person in order to continue to be the object of her lover's desire—to be recognized.

O's fear of loss and abandonment points to an important aspect of the question of pain. The problem of masochism has been oversimplified ever since Freud's paradoxical assertion that the masochist takes pleasure in pain.⁹ But current psychoanalytic theory appreciates that

pain is a route to pleasure only when it involves submission to an idealized figure. As O demonstrates, the masochist's pleasure cannot be understood as a direct, unmediated enjoyment of pain: "She liked the idea of torture, but when she was being tortured herself she would have betrayed the whole world to escape it, and yet when it was over she was happy to have gone through it."¹⁰ The pain of violation serves to protect the self by substituting physical pain for the psychic pain of loss and abandonment. In being hurt by the other, O feels she is being reached, she is able to experience another living presence.* O's pleasure, so to speak, lies in her sense of her own survival and her connection to her powerful lover. Thus as long as O can transpose her fear of loss into submission, as long as she remains the object and manifestation of his power, she is safe.

The experience of pain has yet another dimension. In Freud's terms, pain is the point at which stimuli become too intense for the body or ego to bear. Conversely, pleasure requires a certain control or mastery of stimuli. Thus Freud suggested that the erotization of pain allows a sense of mastery by converting pain into pleasure.¹² But this is true only for the master: O's loss of self is *his* gain, O's pain is *his* pleasure. For the slave, intense pain causes the violent rupture of the self, a profound experience of fragmentation and chaos.¹³ It's true that O now welcomes this loss of self-coherence, but only under a specific condition: that her sacrifice actually creates the master's power, produces his coherent self, in which she can take refuge. Thus in losing her own self, she is gaining access, however circumscribed, to a more powerful one.

*As Masud Khan has pointed out, Freud lacked a conception of psychic pain, since it is the property of the self, for which he also lacked a concept. Khan discusses the importance of finding a witness for one's psychic pain, a witnessing that allows the person to achieve a deep sense of self. He also describes the case of a woman for whom the immersion in a compelling sadomasochistic relationship seemed to be the alternative to psychic breakdown. This form of pain substituted for a deep depression based on very early abandonment and loss.¹¹

The relationship of domination is asymmetrical. It can be reversed, as when O takes on the role of torturer, but it can never become reciprocal or equal. Identification plays an important part in this reversible relationship, but always with the stipulation that the masochist gains her identity through the master's power, even as he actively negates his identity with her. Inflicting pain is the master's way of maintaining his separate identity. In her pain, O's body "moves" her masters, but chiefly because it displays the marks they have left. Of course, their "emotion" is always checked, and is finally diminished as she becomes increasingly a dehumanized object, as her thing-like nature makes her pain mute. Nonetheless, her submission to their will embodies the ultimate recognition of their power. Submission becomes the "pure" form of recognition, even as violation becomes the "pure" form of assertion. The assertion of one individual (the master) is transformed into domination; the other's (the slave's) recognition becomes submission. Thus the basic tension of forces *within* the individual becomes a dynamic *between* individuals.

DOMINATION, DEATH, AND DISCONTENT

The relationship of domination is fueled by the same desire for recognition that we find in love—but why does it take this form? Even if we accept that O is seeking recognition, we still want to know why her search culminates in submission, instead of in a relationship of mutuality. Why this complementarity between the all-powerful and the powerless instead of the equal power of two subjects?

We already have some sense of how Freud and Hegel have approached these questions. Their answers, as I have pointed out, assume the inevitable human aspiration to omnipotence and they begin and end in the same place, in the no-exit of domination, in the closed system of opposites: doer and done-to, master and slave. It is true that Hegel's discussion of recognition implies an ideal of mutuality in which both subjects partake of the contradictory elements of negation

and recognition. But the polarization of these two "moments" is a necessary part of his dialectic, and therefore each subject winds up embodying only one side of the tension. In psychoanalytic terms, this breakdown of wholeness is understood as "splitting."* Wholeness can only exist by maintaining contradiction, but this is not easy. In splitting, the two sides are represented as opposite and distinct tendencies, so that they are available to the subject only as alternatives. The subject can play only one side at a time, projecting the opposite side onto the other. In other words, in the subject's mind, self and other are represented not as equally balanced wholes, but as split into halves. But is the splitting assumed by Hegel inevitable? Is the breakdown of tension inescapable?

George Bataille has directly applied the Hegelian dialectic to erotic violation. His work enables us to look more closely at *Story of O*, to see how splitting and breakdown assume an erotic form. Individual existence for Bataille is a state of separation and isolation: we are as islands, connected yet separated by a sea of death. Eroticism is the perilous crossing of that sea. It opens the way out of isolation by exposing us to "death . . . the denial of our individual lives."¹⁵ The body stands for boundaries: discontinuity, individuality, and life. Consequently the violation of the body is a transgression of the boundary between life and death, even as it breaks through our discontinuity from the other. This break, this crossing of boundaries, is for Bataille the secret of *all*

*The psychoanalytic concept of splitting, like that of repression, has a narrow, technical use as well as a broader metapsychological and metaphoric meaning. Just as repression became a paradigm for a larger cultural process, so might splitting be suggestive not only for individual psychic processes but also for supraindividual ones. Technically, splitting refers to a defense against aggression, an effort to protect the "good" object by splitting off its "bad" aspects that have incurred aggression. But in its broader sense, splitting means any breakdown of the whole, in which parts of self or other are split off and projected elsewhere. In both uses it indicates a polarization, in which opposites—especially good and bad—can no longer be integrated; in which one side is devalued, the other idealized, and each is projected onto different objects.¹⁴

eroticism; and it assumes its starkest expression in erotic violation. It should be noted, however, that the break must never *really* dissolve the boundaries—else death results. Excitement resides in the *risk* of death, not in death itself. And it is erotic complementarity that offers a way to simultaneously break through and preserve the boundaries: in the opposition between violator and violated, one person maintains his boundary and the other allows her boundary to be broken. One remains rational and in control, while the other loses her self. Put another way, complementarity protects the self. Were both partners to give up control, the dissolution of self would be total. The violated partner would have no controlling partner to identify with; she could not “safely” abandon herself. When both partners dissolve the boundary, both experience a fundamental sense of breakdown, a kind of primary, existential anxiety; instead of connection to a defined other, there is a terrifying void. Thus the desire to inflict or receive pain, even as it seeks to break through boundaries, is also an effort to find them.¹⁶

As we have seen in *Story of O*, the control, order, and boundary that the master provides are essential to the erotic experience of submission. Indeed, it is the master’s rational, calculating, even instrumentalizing attitude that excites submission; it is the image of his exquisite control that makes for his thrilling machismo. The pleasure, for both partners, is in his mastery. His intentions, with their sacramental formality, take on the purposefulness of a higher order. The sadist’s disinterestedness, the fact that he does it “less for [his] pleasure than for [the masochist’s] enlightenment,” offers containment and protection. This protective power constitutes the all-important aspect of authority, without which the fantasy is not satisfying.* This authority is what inspires love and transforms violence into an opportunity for voluntary submission.

*A woman who had once been involved in a sadomasochistic relationship complained of her partner that “he was bumbling, he never hurt me where or how I wanted to be hurt.” Indeed, a good sadist is hard to find: he has to intuit his victim’s hidden desires, protect the illusion of oneness and mastery that stem from his knowing what she wants.¹⁷

Although the elements of self-control, intentionality, and authority are meant to uphold the difference between violator and violated, control, as we have seen, tends to become self-defeating. The fact that each partner represents only one pole in a split unity creates the major difficulty in sustaining tension. The continual problem in relations of domination, says Bataille in his commentary on Hegel, is “that the slave by accepting defeat . . . has lost the quality without which he is unable to *recognize* the conqueror so as to satisfy him. The slave is unable to give the master the *satisfaction* without which the master can no longer rest.”¹⁸ The master’s denial of the other’s subjectivity leaves him faced with isolation as the only alternative to being engulfed by the dehumanized other. In either case, the master is actually alone, because the person he is with is no person at all. And likewise, for her part, the slave fears that the master will abandon her to aloneness when he tires of being with someone who is not a person.

Eventually the other’s unreality becomes too powerful; the sadist is in danger of becoming the will-less thing he consumes unless he separates himself completely. And the masochist increasingly feels that she does not exist, that she is without will or desire, that she has no life apart from the other. Indeed, once the tension between subjugation and resistance dissolves, death or abandonment is the inevitable end of the story, and, as we have seen, *Story of O* is deliberately left open to both conclusions. This ambiguity is appropriate because for the masochist the intolerable end is abandonment, while for the sadist it is the death (or murder) of the other, whom he destroys. A parallel dynamic, in which complementarity replaces reciprocity, is a frequent undertow in “ordinary” intimate relationships: one gives, the other refuses to accept; one pursues, the other loses interest; one criticizes, the other feels annihilated. For both partners, the sense of connection is lost: extreme self-sufficiency leads to detachment from the other; extreme dependency vitiates the separate reality of the other.

Metaphorically, then, and sometimes literally, the sadomasochistic relationship tends toward death, or, at any rate, toward deadness, numbness, the exhaustion of sensation. This end is ironic because such

a relationship is initiated in order to reintroduce tension—to counteract numbness with pain, to break encasement through violation. Bataille implies that we need the split unity of master and slave in order to maintain the boundaries that erotic union—the “little death” of the self—threatens to dissolve. But, as we see, split unity culminates in disconnection. The exhaustion of satisfaction that occurs when all resistance is vanquished, all tension is lost, means that the relationship has come full circle, returned to the emptiness from which it was an effort to escape.

But why is loss of tension the beginning and inevitable end of this story? Freud's theory of the instincts offers us one interpretation. Indeed, his whole explanation of the discontents of civilization hinges on his interpretation of loss of tension.¹⁹ Freud believed that only the idea of a death drive that impels us toward complete absence of tension could explain the prevalence of destruction and aggression in human life. Projecting the death drive outward in the form of aggression or mastery was our main protection against succumbing to it. Here, as I see it, is Freud's effort to explain domination, his parallel to the master-slave paradox.

Domination, for Freud, is inevitable since otherwise the death instinct, that primary drive toward nothingness (complete loss of tension), would turn inward and destroy life itself. But fortunately aggression must contend with its “immortal adversary,” the life instinct, Eros. Eros, in general, and sexuality, in particular, neutralize or bind aggression. Freud writes that the life and death instincts almost never appear in isolation, but “are alloyed with each other . . . and so become unrecognizable.” The best place to observe and analyze this merger is erotic life: sadism and masochism are “manifestations of the destructive instinct . . . strongly alloyed with erotism.”²⁰ Indeed, erotic domination, Freud continues, may be the prime place to apprehend the alliance of Eros and the death instinct:

It is in sadism, where the death instinct twists the erotic aim in its own sense, and yet at the same time fully satisfies the erotic

urge, that we succeed in obtaining the clearest insight into its nature, and its relation to Eros. But even where it emerges without any sexual purpose, in the blindest fury of destructiveness, we cannot fail to recognize that the satisfaction of the [death] instinct . . . [presents] the ego with a fulfillment of the latter's old wishes for omnipotence.²¹

When aggression is projected outward and harnessed by civilization, it winds up doing *outside* what it would otherwise do *inside*: reducing the world, objectifying it, subjugating it. If we translate this process back into Hegel's terms, this means that the self refuses the claim of the outside world (the other) to limit his absoluteness. He asserts omnipotence. Omnipotence, we might then say, is the manifestation of Freud's death instinct. When the destructive instinct is projected outward, the problem of omnipotence is not solved, but merely relocated. Nor does the fusion of the death instinct with Eros solve the problem. For even the alloy of destruction and Eros, as the cycle of escape from and return to deadness in erotic domination illustrates, brings us back to the death drive's original aim: the reduction of all tension.

Omnipotence and loss of tension actually refer to the same phenomenon. Omnipotence, whether in the form of merging or aggression, means the complete assimilation of the other and the self. It corresponds to the zero point of tension between self and other. Domination, as Freud sees it, is both an expression of omnipotence (or death)—the complete absence of tension—and an effort to protect the self from it: to create tension, to break up this assimilation of or by the other that allows nothing to exist *outside*. Yet it comes full circle, and leaves the self encapsulated in a closed system—the omnipotent mind—at least until the other fights back.

Let us now see what happens when we examine the cycle of omnipotence, from one point of zero tension to the other, in terms of intersubjective theory. In this view, the circular movement from numbness to exhaustion which characterizes domination is a manifesta-

tion not of the death instinct toward zero tension, but of the breakdown of recognition between self and other. Domination presumes a subject already caught in omnipotence, unable to make "live" contact with outside reality, to experience the other person's subjectivity. But this apparent first cause is itself the result of an earlier breakdown between self and other—which, though pervasive, is not inevitable. Insofar as domination is an alienated form of differentiation, an effort to recreate tension through distance, idealization, and objectification, it is destined to repeat the original breakdown unless and until the other makes a difference.

DESTRUCTION AND SURVIVAL

Winnicott's idea of destruction is about the difference the other can make. Destruction, after all, is a way of differentiating the self—the attempt to place the other outside one's fantasy and experience him as external reality. I suggest that erotic domination expresses a basic differentiating tendency that has undergone a transformation. As we have seen, the fate of this tendency depends on whether it is met with the other's capitulation/retaliation or survival. In intersubjective terms, violation is the attempt to push the other outside the self, to attack the other's separate reality in order finally to discover it. The adult sadist, for example, is searching for a surviving other, but his search is already prejudiced by his childhood disappointment with an other who did not survive. Likewise, the adult masochist continues to find an other who survives, just as she did in childhood, but again loses herself in the bargain.

The controlled practice of sadomasochism portrays a classic drama of destruction and survival. The thrill of transgression and the sense of complete freedom for the sadist depend on the masochist's survival. When the masochist endures his unremitting attack and remains intact, the sadist experiences this as love. By alleviating his fear (guilt) that his aggression will annihilate her, she creates for him the first condition

of freedom. By the same token, the masochist experiences as love the sharing of psychic pain, the opportunity to give over to pain in the presence of a trusted other who comprehends the suffering he inflicts. Hence the love and gratitude that can accompany the ritual of domination when it is contained and limited.²²

In a child's development the initial destruction can be seen simply as part of assertion: the desire to affect (negate) others, to be recognized. When destruction fails, the aggression goes inside and fuels the sense of omnipotence.²³ Originally, there is a kind of innocence to the project of destruction. In Freud's theory of sadism—developed before he introduced the death instinct²⁴—the infant at first ruthlessly attacks and devours the world with no sense of consequences. At this stage of primary sadism the child does not know about inflicting hurt; he simply expects to have his cake and eat it too. Only when the child internalizes his aggression and moves into the masochistic position can he imagine the pain that might come to the other. Then "real" sadism, the desire to hurt and reduce the other as one has been hurt oneself, comes into being. In short, aggression, internalized as masochism, reappears as sadism.* Through this internalization comes the ability to

*Jean Laplanche, the French psychoanalyst, has elaborated on Freud's model of the movement from primary sadism to masochism to sadism proper. He suggests that the movement of internalization turns aggression into sexual fantasy; that is, in turning inward, aggression is "alloyed" with sexuality. Whether the fantasy is active or passive, the act of "fantasmaticization" is decisive; indeed, it actually constitutes sexuality and the unconscious. Sexuality, by which Laplanche means the realm of sexual fantasy, is the opposite of Eros, a kind of "frenetic anti-life."²⁵ Eros, if we recall Freud's usage, is directed outward, toward the other—hence the opposite of the inward-turning aggression that is sexuality. It follows from Laplanche's argument that the true opposition of instincts is not between Eros and death, but Eros and aggression, the latter often appearing in the guise of sexuality. This comes close to the intersubjective opposition between negating and recognizing the other. Indeed, Laplanche's idea of the internalization of aggression as sexual fantasy is comparable to Winnicott's idea that when destruction cannot be directed toward the other, the subject remains caught in mental omnipotence. His idea of the opposition between Eros and sexuality suggests something

play both roles in fantasy, to experience vicariously the other's part, and so enjoy the act of violation.

In much of early life, destruction is properly directed toward the other, and is internalized when the other cannot "catch" it, and survive. Ordinarily, some failure to survive is inevitable; for that matter, so is the internalization of aggression. When the parent fails to survive attack—to withstand the destruction without retaliating *or* retreating—the child turns its aggression inward and develops what we know as rage. But when things go well this rage often dissipates through a movement in the relationship, a shift back to mutual understanding that enables the child once again to feel the presence of the other. (For example, the child accepts the frustration but communicates the fantasy of retaliation to the parent who has frustrated him, as in, "Here is a bulldozer coming to knock down the house.")

When the child experiences the parent as caving in, he continues to attack, in fantasy or reality, seeking a boundary for his reactive rage. The child who has been indulged, allowed to abuse his mother (or both parents), and given no limits to his fantasy of omnipotence, is the typical "sadistic" child. ("I can't control him," says the parent, and then repeats for the fifth time "Michael, if you don't behave you'll have to leave the table and go up to your room.") For him, the real object, the one who cannot be destroyed, never comes into view. For him, agency and assertion are not integrated in the context of mutuality and respect for the other but in the context of control and retaliation. The sadist-child is *cognitively* aware of the difference between self and other, but *emotionally* this awareness is hollow and does not counteract the desire to control the other.

When the parent caves in, the child experiences his expanding elation, grandiosity, and self-absorption as flying off into space—he

similar to Winnicott's distinction between having an interaction with the outside other and relating to the object as one's mental product—a two-person versus a one-person experience.

finds no limits, no otherness. The world now seems empty of all human life, there is no one to connect with, "the world is all me." As the analyst Sheldon Bach describes it, when the self feels absolute, a loss of differentiation occurs in which "the subject and object are one; the [person] has eaten up reality."²⁶ What the child feels is something like this: When the other crumbles under the impact of my act, then my act seems to drop off the edge of the world into emptiness, and I feel that I will soon follow. In this void begins the loss of tension or boundaries, a by-product of losing the other.

Survival means that the parent can tolerate deflating the child's grandiosity enough—but just enough—to let him know that he can go only so far and no further, that someone else's needs and reality set a limit to his mental feats. The parent must feel separate and secure enough to be able to tolerate the thwarted child's anger without giving in. Otherwise the parent is destroyed in the child's eyes. The child involved in the process of destruction is like Icarus flying too near the sun. When the parent sets limits, she is actually protecting the child from the dissolution that occurs when the absolute self has its way. Of course, as we will see in our discussion of masochism, the child who is never allowed to destroy can never assume the power to fly or discover his limits.

The conversion from assertion to aggression, from interaction to mental control, works in tandem. When things are not resolved "outside," between self and other, the interaction is transferred into the world of fantasy; this includes identifying with the one we harm. The drama of reversible violator and victim displaces the tension of interaction with the other. This drama now occurs within the omnipotence of mental life, the encapsulated sphere of the intrapsychic. In successful destruction (when the other survives), the distinction between mental acts and what happens out there in "reality" becomes more than a cognitive awareness; it becomes a felt experience. The distinction between my fantasy of you and you as a real person is the very essence of connection.

The underlying theme of sadism is the attempt to break through to

the other. The desire to be discovered underlies its counterpart, namely, masochism. Emmanuel Ghent has called this desire the wish for surrender, for which submission is the "ever-ready look-alike."²⁷ Like the sadist's aggression, the masochist's submission is ambiguous, conflating the repetition of an old frustration and the wish for something new. Ghent suggests that it is a wish to break out of what Winnicott called the "false self." The false self is the compliant, adaptive self that has staved off chaos by accepting the other's direction and control, that has maintained connection to the object by renouncing exploration, aggression, separateness.

This compliance is associated with another kind of failed childhood destruction, one in which the self has not survived. The "masochistic" child has endured not caving in but retaliation, in the form of either punishment or withdrawal. He destroys the other only in fantasy; he will never take a full swing at the parent to test if she will survive. His rage is turned inward and apparently spares the other, yet the loss of a viable external other overshadows the struggle to differentiate. The masochist despairs of ever holding the attention or winning the recognition of the other, of being securely held in the other's mind.

Contemporary Freudian ego psychology has often understood submission as a failure to separate and as an inhibition of aggression. But, as Ghent suggests, framing masochism as the desire for self-discovery in the space provided by the other allows us to recognize the wish as well as the defense. The masochist's self is "false" because, lacking this space, he has not been able to realize the desire and agency that come from within. He has not experienced his impulses and acts as his own, arising without direction from outside. This experience is what he longs for, although he may not know it.²⁸

Masochism can be seen, therefore, not only as a strategy for escaping aloneness, but also as a search for aloneness *with* the other: by letting the other remain in control, the masochist hopes to find a "safe" open space in which to abandon the protective false self and allow the nascent, hidden self to emerge. Within this space, he seeks an opportunity for Winnicott's transitional experience free of the self-conscious-

ness and adaptation that inhibit him. The masochist's wish to be reached, penetrated, found, released—a wish that can be expressed in the metaphor of violence as well as in metaphors of redemption—is the other side of the sadist's wish to discover the other. The masochist's wish to experience his authentic, inner reality in the company of an other parallels the sadist's wish to get outside the self into a shared reality.

These dynamics, then, are not merely the stuff of domination; they are also what make mutuality possible. They allow us to maintain connection so that we are not shut off from the world in the monadic capsule of the mind. Mental omnipotence signifies the absence of this connection, a breakdown of differentiation in which self is assimilated to other or other is assimilated to self. Internalization then replaces interaction or exchange with the outside.

The state of omnipotence, with its absence of tension, gives birth to domination. In the absence of a differentiated sense of self and other, the vital sharing between separate minds is replaced by almost exclusively complementary relationships. In infancy, the complementary interaction, in which the parent facilitates a positive change in the infant's states, is often a prelude to intersubjective sharing. The other must often do something to regulate, soothe, and make the self receptive for such exchange. But increasingly the relationship should shift in emphasis from regulation to the true exchange of recognition itself. What we see in domination is a relationship in which complementarity has completely eclipsed mutuality, so that the underlying wish to interact with someone truly outside, with an equivalent center of desire, does not emerge.

This dynamic of destruction and survival is the central pattern of erotic union. In erotic union, the other receives and recognizes the subject's acts including his acts of destruction. Eros is certainly not free of all that we associate with aggression, assertion, mastery, and domination. But what makes sexuality erotic is the survival of the other with and despite destruction. What distinguishes Eros from perversion is not freedom from fantasies of power and surrender, for Eros does

not purge sexual fantasy—it plays with it. The idea of destruction reminds us that the element of aggression is necessary in erotic life; it is the element of *survival*, the difference the other can make, which distinguishes erotic union, which plays with the fantasy of domination, from real domination.

As I suggested earlier, in erotic union losing oneself and being wholly there occur together, as if without contradiction. The sense of losing oneself creatively, of becoming absorbed in the other is often only a hairsbreadth away from self-absorption.²⁹ In erotic union, the fundamental experience of attunement—that separate individuals can share the same feeling—is affirmed. Erotic domination, on the other hand, exemplifies the *fatality* of dissolving paradox into polarity (splitting) even as it shows it to be the endpoint of a complex process, and not simply the original human condition.

DOMINATION AND THE SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

It might seem that the association of domination and gender is obvious: men, after all, have everywhere dominated women, and one would expect this to color erotic relationships as well. Yet, even if we accepted this logic, we would still want to understand how the subjugation of women takes hold in the psyche and shapes the pattern of domination. Furthermore, it is increasingly apparent that the roles of master and slave are not intrinsically or exclusively male and female respectively; as the original “masochist” of *Venus in Furs* (Leopold von Sacher-Masoch) reminds us, the opposite is often true: the actual practice of sadomasochism frequently reverses heterosexual patterns. And, for that matter, sadomasochism is just as likely to occur in homosexual relationships. The question we are addressing, therefore, is not why are men sadists and women masochists, since this need not be the case; but rather, how have sadism and masochism become associated with masculinity and femininity?—

The deep structure of gender complementarity has persisted despite

the increased flexibility of contemporary sex roles. To understand the origins of male mastery and female submission, we must look at the characteristic course taken by each gender in the early differentiation process. Since women have almost everywhere been the primary caretakers of small children, both boys and girls have differentiated in relation to a woman—the mother.* When we look to the typical course of male differentiation, we see at once that this creates a special difficulty for boys. While all children identify with their first loved one, boys must dissolve this identification and define themselves as the different sex. Initially all infants feel themselves to be like their mothers. But boys discover that they cannot grow up to *become* her; they can only *have* her. This discovery leads to a break in identification for boys which girls are spared. Male children achieve their masculinity by denying their original identification or oneness with their mothers.³⁰

Robert Stoller's work on the development and disruption of gender identity has offered much insight into this process. He has proposed that male identity is a secondary phenomenon, since it is achieved by overcoming a primary identification with the mother. This position, so contrary to Freud's assumption that children of both sexes begin as “little men,” has wide ramifications. For the boy to become masculine, writes Stoller, “he must separate himself in the outside world from his mother's female body and in his inside world from his own already formed primary identification with femaleness and femininity. This great task is often not completed. . . .”³¹

The boy develops his gender and identity by means of establishing discontinuity and difference from the person to whom he is most

*Despite women's universal role as primary caretakers of small children, there is great variation in the organization of childrearing. Only in Western middle-class families do we see the typical pattern of babies attended by one lone mother. Thus our theory, unless amended, might strictly apply to such families. On the other hand, patterns of childrearing have been changing—in favor of paternal participation—in these families.

attached. This process of disidentification³² explains the repudiation of the mother that underlies conventional masculine identity formation, and results in a kind of "fault line" running through the male achievement of individuality.

The tendency of erotic love to become erotic domination can be seen as a casualty of this characteristically male form of establishing separation. The need to sever the identification with the mother in order to be confirmed both as a separate person and as a male person—and for the boy these are hard to distinguish—often prevents the boy from recognizing his mother. She is not seen as an independent person (another subject), but as something other—as nature, as an instrument or object, as less than human. The premise of his independence is to say, "I am nothing like she who cares for me." An objectifying attitude comes to replace the earlier interactions of infancy in which mutual recognition and proud assertion could still coexist. Male identity, as Nancy Chodorow points out, emphasizes only one side of the balance of differentiation—difference over sharing, separation over connection, boundaries over communion, self-sufficiency over dependency.³³

In breaking the identification with and dependency on mother, the boy is in danger of losing his capacity for mutual recognition altogether. The emotional attunement and bodily harmony that characterized his infantile exchange with mother now threaten his identity. He is, of course, able cognitively to accept the principle that the other is separate, but without the experience of empathy and shared feeling that can unite separate subjectivities. Instead, the other, especially the female other, is related to as object. When this relationship with the other as object is generalized, rationality substitutes for affective exchange with the other.³⁴ This rationality bypasses real recognition of the other's subjectivity. The process might be called "false differentiation."

Violation is an elaboration of this one-sided, or "false," differentiation, asserting absolute difference from its object, an object we can now see as representing the mother.³⁵ A fantasy of maternal power, of being reabsorbed, underlies this curious method of asserting difference. The

danger that violation is meant to oppose—the ultimate loss of tension—is easily equated with the return to oneness with the mother, and can now be evoked by any profound experience of dependency or communion (emotional or physical), such as erotic love. The only defense against losing difference lies in reversing the power relationship so that the master now controls the other, while still proclaiming his boundaries intact.*

Erotic domination represents an intensification of male anxiety and defense in relation to the mother. The repudiated maternal body persists as the object to be done to and violated, to be separated from, to have power over, to denigrate.³⁶ Thus, on a visit to Sir Stephen's villa in the South, O thinks how fortunate it is that they are far from the sea, for the sea smells like dung (*mer = sea; mère = mother*). O further complies in the denigration of what is specifically female in her sexuality when Sir Stephen uses her "as a boy," that is, denies her feminine organs. The anal allusions degrade what woman has to offer, her bodily difference from man.

It is precisely this objectification, combined with maintaining absolute difference and control, that informs the master's transgression. The vulnerability of a masculinity that is forged in the crucible of femininity, the "great task" of separation that is so seldom completed, lays the groundwork for the later objectification of women. The mother stands as the prototype of the undifferentiated object. She serves men as their other, their counterpart, the side of themselves they repress.³⁷

The view of mother as object resounds throughout our culture. In general psychoanalytic discourse, the child relates to the mother as to

*Of course, as we have seen, the infant is never literally one with mother, but this early identification is retroactively called (represented intrapsychically as) "oneness," i.e., the absence of a fundamental difference. The defense against oneness develops according to a principle of reversal: I will do to you what I perceive you are doing to me. If I perceive your love as stifling my subjectivity, I will—again, through love—deny yours. Thus, as complementarity is no longer tempered by commonality, "oneness" appears even more absolute and threatening.

an object of his drives, and correspondingly devalues her independent subjectivity. Independence from the mother as object rather than recognition of her as subject constitutes the essence of individuation. And these assumptions are part of a larger problem: to the extent that until recently "man" and "individual" were synonymous, the male experience of differentiation has stamped the image of individuality. The image of the other that predominates in Western thought is not that of a vitally real presence but a cognitively perceived object. In this sense "false" differentiation has been a constant component of the Western version of individuation. Recognizing the other has been the exceptional moment, a moment of rare innocence, the recovery of a lost paradise.

The complement to the male refusal to recognize the other is woman's own acceptance of her lack of subjectivity, her willingness to offer recognition without expecting it in return. (The classic maternal ideal of motherhood—a paragon of self-abnegation—is only a beautification of this lack.) The female difficulty in differentiation can be described almost as the mirror image of the male's: not the denial of the other, but the denial of the self. Thus the fact of women's mothering not only explains masculine sadism, it also reveals a "fault line" in female development that leads to masochism. Whereas the boy's early difficulty seems to occur in making the switch to a masculine identification, the girl requires no such shift in identification away from her mother. This makes her identity less problematic, but it is a disadvantage in that she possesses no obvious way of disidentifying from her mother, no hallmark of separateness. The feminine tendency therefore is not to emphasize but to underplay independence.

As Chodorow has argued, mothers tend to identify more strongly with their daughters; whereas they push their sons out of the nest, they have greater difficulty separating from daughters.³⁸ Thus it is more likely that girls would fear separateness and tend to sustain the tie to mother through compliance and self-denial. If not acute, this tendency would be unremarkable. But the girl's relationship to the mother,

emphasizing merging and continuity at the expense of individuality and independence, provides fertile ground for submission.

Submission, as we saw in *Story of O*, is often motivated by the fear of separation and abandonment; masochism reflects the inability to express one's own desire and agency. In submission, even the fulfillment of desire is made to appear as the expression of the other's will. The masochist abrogates her will because the exercise of independence is experienced as dangerous. To the extent that the mother has sacrificed her own independence, the girl's attempt at independence would represent an assertion of power for which she has no basis in identification. (As we shall see in chapter 3, the girl may identify with her father, but this has its own difficulties.) The girl's sense of self is shaped by the realization that her mother's source of power resides in her self-sacrifice. For the girl the agony of asserting difference is that she will destroy (internally) her mother, who is not only an object of love but also a mainstay of identity. Thus she protects the all-good, all-powerful maternal object, at the price of compliance. She becomes unable to distinguish what she wants from what mother wants. The fear of separation and difference has been transposed into submission.

Sadomasochism gives this fear objective form. In erotic submission, fear of the master's power takes the place of the deeper fear—of the separation that feels like death. The deepest anxiety can be controlled through "the discipline of service and obedience."³⁹ In submission, the masochist also protects the other from damage by taking the fault and the injury upon herself. At the same time, she is able to "enjoy" the sadist's attack. His assertion of subjectivity and difference is like a breath of the inaccessible outdoors. He embodies activity and difference for her. The vicarious quality of her enjoyment recapitulates the vicarious pleasure of the self-sacrificing mother with whom she identifies. Thus, submission for women allows a reenactment of their early identificatory relationship to the mother; it is a replication of the maternal attitude itself.

This cyclical mechanism allows us to untangle the fateful association

that has dogged psychoanalytic debate since Freud's concept of "feminine masochism" was elaborated by Marie Bonaparte and Helene Deutsch to include the notion that masochism is an inevitable component of female sexuality, childbearing, and motherhood.⁴⁰ Undeniably, femininity and motherhood as we know them have been tainted with submission, self-abnegation, and helplessness. This is true even when submission works to conceal or deny the power that women as mothers do exercise.

And this fact, that women participate in their own submission, has often embarrassed critics of psychoanalytic theory. Some feminist critics, who feel that women have unjustly borne the burden of their victimization, have insisted that women are simply unwilling conscripts in an erotic fantasy formed by and for men—victims of the male pornographic imagination. Susan Griffin, for example, argues that the subjugation of women can be equated with the repression of nature.⁴¹ But, in fact, women are not the embodiment of nature, although they have long been captives of that metaphor. Indeed, in accepting that equation, women once again participate in their own subjugation. Women, like men, are by "nature" social, and it is the repression of their sociability and social agency—the repression of the social, intersubjective side of the self—that is at issue. The equation *woman = motherhood = nature* is a symptom, not a cure. Embracing this equation, feminists have become caught in a contradiction: exalting women's maternal "nature" while disclaiming women's masochistic "nature."

Arguing from a different standpoint, the psychologist Paula Caplan has renewed the battle against the psychoanalytic position that women are "innately" masochistic. Caplan attacks the idea of "pleasure in pain" in great detail, but, unfortunately, sidesteps the issue of submission. Her explanation for masochism is that what is "called masochistic has tended to be the very essence of trained femininity in Western culture."⁴² Her argument implies that social learning of a cultural myth about womanhood suffices to explain the presence of masochistic fantasies in women, or that the association of femininity with maso-

chism is the result merely of a perjorative view of maternal nurturance and altruism. Caplan is right that the association of femininity with masochism persists in the culture; but the explanation for that persistence cannot be sought in social learning.⁴³

From a psychoanalytic point of view, it is unsatisfactory to merely attribute the pervasiveness of submission fantasies in erotic life to cultural labeling or the derogation of women. The alternative to a biological explanation of masochism must be sought not only in culture, but in the interaction of culture and psychological processes. Cultural myths and labels, while undoubtedly destructive, still do not explain how the "essence of trained femininity" gets into women's heads and is there converted into pleasurable fantasies of erotic submission. To begin to explain it, we must start with the way in which the mother's lack of subjectivity, as perceived by both male and female children, creates an internal propensity toward feminine masochism and male sadism. Labeling is a result, not a cause, of that propensity.

Notwithstanding the persistence of these gender associations, it is safe to say that the mainstream of psychoanalytic thought today rejects the idea of feminine masochism. (Caplan has a hard time actually finding recent psychoanalytic proponents.) The analysis of submission as a defensive strategy of the self has become far more popular than Freud's notion of femininity in explaining masochism. If anything, we are faced with the opposite problem: with a few exceptions (notably, in Stoller), these problems of the self have largely been constructed as though gender played no role whatever. Nowhere do we find the explanation that gender polarity plays a role in fostering the breakdown in the balance of differentiation. Yet clearly, the splitting that is so typical in sadomasochism is in large part a problem of gender. The defensive masculine stance promotes a dualism, a polarization of subject and object. The assignment of subject status to male and object status to female follows from the seemingly unavoidable fact that the boy must struggle free with all the violence of a second birth from the woman who bore him. In this second birth, the fantasy of omnipotence and erotic domination begins.

At the same time, and ironically, the fantasy of erotic dominance and submission expresses the deep longing for wholeness. But as long as the shape of the whole is not informed by mutuality, this longing only leads to an unequal complementarity in which one person plays master, the other slave. And even when men and women reverse their roles, as they often do, the sense of "playing the other" is never lost. Gender continues, consciously and unconsciously, to represent only one part of a polarized whole, one aspect of the self-other relationship. One person ("the woman") is not allowed to play the subject; one person ("the man") arrogates subjectivity only to himself. Again, the groundwork for this division is laid in the mother's renunciation of her own will, in her consequent lack of subjectivity for her children, and particularly in the male child's repudiation of his commonality with her.

It would seem obvious that this lack of maternal subjectivity is a great, if not the greatest, impediment to the experience of successful destruction and survival by both male and female children. Only a mother who feels entitled to be a person in her own right can ever be seen as such by her child, and only such a mother can appreciate and set limits to the inevitable aggression and anxiety that accompany a child's growing independence. Only someone who fully achieves subjectivity can survive destruction and permit full differentiation. This fact has been remarkably elusive. It seems intolerable to the narcissism of adults and children alike that the limits a mother sets should not merely be an occasional dose of medicine corresponding to the child's needs, but might actually proceed from the mother's assertion of her own separate selfhood. The possibility of balancing the recognition of the child's needs with the assertion of one's own has scarcely been put forward as an ideal.

It is thus necessary to reconceive the ideal—and the reality—of motherhood in order to realign the process of differentiation, to mitigate the splitting into complementarity. The structure of individuation which permeates our culture, and which privileges separation over dependence, cannot simply be countered by its mirror opposite.

Rather, it must be criticized in light of a vision of a balance in which neither pole dominates the other, in which paradox is sustained.

This vision is important to a feminist critique of society especially now that male and female roles are no longer as binding as they once were. Today women in some sectors of society may adopt the same emphatic autonomy, the same "false" differentiation at the expense of real recognition and attunement, that has heretofore characterized the ideal of masculine individuality. The stereotype of the "career woman" is that she is able to be as detached and impersonal "as a man." But this individuation based on denying the need for others is hardly liberation.

Story of O supports our suspicion that this kind of individuation, rather than dissolving domination, fosters it. O's story is no simple housewife's tale; it is rather that of the "new woman" who emerged in this century. O, herself a fashion photographer, is as much a producer of objectification as its victim. Thus O is not so different from the masochist of a more recent novel, Pat Califia's *Jessie*, a thoroughly independent woman, who describes erotic violation as finally releasing her from "the bubble of the self, the prison of the mind."⁴⁴ To repeat, erotic domination, for both sides, draws its appeal in part from its offer to break the encasement of the isolated self, to explode the numbness that comes of "false" differentiation. It is a reaction to the predicament of solitary confinement—being unable to get through to the other, or be gotten through to—which is our particularly modern form of bondage. The castle of Roissy marshals the old forms of bondage—the ritual trappings of male dominion and female submission—as if they could redeem us from the sterility of modern rationality. So in our era of sexual equality and liberation, the fantasy of erotic domination returns like the repressed. But this return does not signal an end to confinement, only a further twisting in the chains, a testimony to the persistence of splitting and gender polarity in our structure of individuality.

To uncover this persistence is to confront the original sin of denying

recognition to the other, and to rediscover the lost tension between self and other. This tension, a fragile balance, to be sure, can only be sustained through the lived experience of recognition, the meeting of separate minds. I have argued that the longing for recognition lies beneath the sensationalism of power and powerlessness, that the unrecognizable forms often taken by our desire are the result of a complicated but ultimately understandable process—a process which explains how our deepest desires for freedom and communion become implicated in control and submission. From such desires the bonds of love are forged.

CHAPTER THREE

Woman's Desire

THE DISCUSSION OF erotic domination has shown how the breakdown of the tension between assertion and recognition becomes associated with the polarization of gender identity. Male and female each adopt one side of an interlocking whole. This one-sided character of differentiation evolves in response to the mother's lack of subjectivity, with which the girl identifies and the boy disidentifies.

This chapter will focus on woman's lack of subjectiv-

process of individual and social change. To aspire to this renewal is to accept the inevitable inconstancy and imperfection of our efforts, without relinquishing the project. Feminism, though many think the contrary, has opened up a new possibility of mutual recognition between men and women. It has allowed men and women to begin confronting the difficulties of recognizing an other, and to expose the painful longing for what lies on the other side of these difficulties. To attempt to recover recognition in personal life does not mean to politicize personal life relentlessly or to evade politics and give up the hope of transformation—though all these failures do happen in real life. It means to see that the personal and social are interconnected, and to understand that if we suffocate our personal longings for recognition, we will suffocate our hope for social transformation as well.

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playback of their motions. Recognizing the difference as the complement to sameness or oneness is a major point that distinguishes intersubjective theory from self psychology.

80. Following Stern's taxonomy (in "The Early Development of Schemas of Self") we can say that both having one's state transformed by the other, as in drive theory, and the complementarity of being held, as in object-relations theory, focus on the individually conceived subject and his complementary relationship to the object. Both stand in contrast to the mutuality posited by intersubjective theory.

81. Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

82. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

CHAPTER 2: MASTER AND SLAVE

1. See Freud's remarks on omnipotence in "On Narcissism" and in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

2. De Beauvoir, following Hegel, begins *The Second Sex* with the argument that the question is not why men want to dominate, but why they are able to do so. This approach, comparable in a way to Freud's assumption that man is a wolf to man unless restrained by civilization, might make submission seem unproblematic, but, in fact, de Beauvoir explores woman's psychology in detail.

3. See Andrea Dworkin, "Woman as Victim: *Story of O*," and Susan Griffin, *Pornography and Silence*. Part of the failure of such analyses, which are endemic to the feminist movement against pornography, is the denial of the difference between voluntary, ritual acts of submission that are subjectively considered pleasurable and acts of battery or violation that are terrifying and involuntary although they may occur within a theoretically voluntary contract like marriage.

4. Regine Deforges, *Confessions of O: Conversations with Pauline Réage*.

5. Réage, *Story of O*, pp. 15–17.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

9. Freud, "The Economic Problem of Masochism." The idea of masochism as pleasure in pain was perhaps an overly influential condensation of Freud's thinking (in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" he distinguishes between the "pain itself" and "the accompanying sexual excitement"). It has been amended by many contemporary psychoanalysts, who interpret masochism in terms of the ego or the self and its object relations; they see masochism as a desire for submission to an idealized other in order to protect against overwhelming feelings of psychic pain, object loss, and fragmentation. See my review of the problem in "The Alienation of Desire"; see also Masud Khan, *Alienation in Perversions*; Robert Stoller, *Sexual Excitement and Perversion*; Esther Menaker, *Masochism and the Emerging Ego*; and V. Smirnoff, "The Masochistic Contract." These writings point to the underlying narcissistic dilemmas that are "solved" by the infliction of pain administered by an idealized authority. These explanations do have a precedent in Freud's original idea of "moral masochism," which he defined as "the ego's own masochism" (see "The Economic Problem of Masochism") and which Karen Horney subsequently related to low self-esteem and difficulty in separation ("The Problem of Feminine Masochism").

10. Réage, *Story of O*, p. 152.

11. Khan, *Alienation in Perversions*.

12. Freud's point ("The Economic Problem of Masochism") is that eroticization allows unmanageable, negative stimuli to be managed.

13. See Leo Bersani, *Baudelaire and Freud*, for a discussion of this.

14. Freud not only used the term "repression" to refer to a specific defense, but also as the fundamental pillar (*Grundpfeil*) of psychoanalysis (*An Outline of Psychoanalysis*). Splitting was originally used by Freud in a narrower sense (see "The Splitting of the Ego"), but was made a key concept by Melanie Klein (see

Envy and Gratitude, pp. 324–25) and those influenced by her. Here splitting refers variously to the process of separating the object into good and bad to keep the bad from contaminating the good, to the early division between love and hate, to splitting off part of the self and projecting it onto the object, and related mechanisms. Freud did refer to the splitting of bad and good object in just this sense in a footnote to “The ‘Uncanny.’” Kernberg (*Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism*) has claimed splitting (especially idealization and devaluation) is the crucial defense in borderline disorders, thus giving it a function parallel to that of repression in neurosis. I prefer Fairbairn’s view (*Psychoanalytic Studies*) which insists on the defensive character of splitting—however ubiquitous—to Klein’s view, which makes it a developmental phase.

15. Georges Bataille, *Death and Sensuality*, pp. 11–25, especially p. 24.

16. In the view of self psychology, it is the fear of losing the self, fragmenting, and falling apart that is a primary motive in masochism (see Stolorow and Lachmann, *Psychoanalysis of Developmental Arrests*).

17. Elizabeth Harris, “Sadomasochism: A Personal Experience.” The psychoanalytic interpretation of masochism shows how the masochist is the hidden director of the experience, as Stoller (*Sexual Excitement*) points out. Those who write about sadomasochism from personal experience concur. See Susan Farr, “The Art of Discipline.”

18. Georges Bataille, “Hemingway in the Light of Hegel,” p. 12. See also Richard Sennett, *Authority*, for a reading of Hegel in terms of power and obedience.

19. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*; see also *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* on the death drive.

20. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 119. Freud concludes this passage with his famous remark that aggression is “the greatest impediment to civilization,” threatening us with the “hostility of each against all and of all against each”; that the evolution of civilization depends upon “the struggle between Eros and Death” (p. 122).

21. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 121. I am suggesting here that we see instinctual tension as a metaphor for the experience of the self, for the

condition of stasis between self and other represented in the mind as a condition of the self. This representation has a real appearance—what began as something between subjects winds up being experienced as the fantasy life of the single subject, appearing as instinctual or primary, as purely internal and self-generated.

22. Descriptions of sadomasochistic experiences by women participants emphasize such emotions. Susan Farr (“The Art of Discipline”) argues that for the sadist, who enjoys the “illusion of complete powerfulness” and the other’s survival, the sense of reality is enhanced: “In the process, lovers become real to each other . . . like the process of becoming Real described in the children’s book, *The Velveteen Rabbit*. . . .”

23. My position here is a modification of Winnicott’s which postulates a kind of early omnipotence. The outcome of failed destruction is splitting. Norbert Freedman (“On Splitting”) gives a good account of this sequence: Splitting “comes from a point in time at which the infant faces the total randomness of the environment vis-à-vis his or her own actions, so that it no longer seems possible to affect the environment (the ‘not-me’) strictly through the action of the self. The rage that ensues from this confrontation with helplessness forms the genesis of splitting. The key to the resolution of splitting is the establishment of externality” (p. 244).

24. Freud, “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes.”

25. Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, p. 124. Laplanche writes: “Eros . . . differs from sexuality, the first discovery of psychoanalysis. Eros is what seeks to maintain, preserve, and even augment the cohesion and the synthetic tendency of living beings and of psychical life. . . . [W]hat appears with Eros is the *bound and binding* form of sexuality. . . . In the face of this triumph of the vital and the homeostatic, it remained for Freud . . . to reaffirm . . . a kind of antilife as sexuality, frenetic enjoyment [*jouissance*], the negative, the repetition compulsion. . . . For the death drive does not possess its own energy. Its energy is libido. Or better put, the death drive is the very soul, the constitutive principle of libidinal circulation” (p. 123). Thus Laplanche argues, rightly I think, that sexuality can be alloyed either with Eros or with death and destruction, but the great discovery of psychoanalysis was this latter, negative form of sexuality, which opens up to us the peculiar attraction of death and destruction.

26. Sheldon Bach, "Self-Love and Object-Love."
27. Emmanuel Ghent, "Masochism, Submission, and Surrender."
28. Ibid.
29. In *Metamorphosis*, Ernst Schachtel developed the idea of becoming creatively absorbed in the other as a kind of transcendent experience of losing the self.
30. Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*. See also Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*.
31. Stoller, *Perversion*, p. 99.
32. Ralph Greenson, "Dis-identifying from Mother."
33. Chodorow, "Gender, Relation and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective."
34. Keller (*Reflections on Gender and Science*) has discussed the consequences of disidentification from the mother for a certain kind of rationality, a static objectivity, that distances from the object.
35. Stoller (*Perversion*) speculates that "perversion is that ultimate in separations, mother murder" (p. 150). Stoller perceives in perversion both the undoing and the promotion of separation. I agree with this paradox. I think it offers a better explanation than Chasseguet-Smirgel's view that violation is simply an effort at dedifferentiation, a transgression against the paternal law (see "Reflections on the Connections between Perversion and Sadism" and "Perversion and the Universal Law"). The contradictory intentions of sadism should be kept in mind, since they express the dark side of paternal separation.
36. Chasseguet-Smirgel ("Perversion and the Universal Law") demonstrates how de Sade's main object of attack is the maternal body, for the mother is perceived as poisoning the child, using him for her own purposes. I believe that the crucial motivation in this attack is envy of the mother's perceived power,

- or, in Klein's sense, envy of the breast; mother is able to provide or withhold the goodness she alone contains. This envy has a double consequence, which forms the essence of male sadism: to simultaneously deny mother's goodness and declare it bad, and to become oneself the powerful figure who can withhold or grant satisfaction.
37. I am supposing that de Beauvoir's woman as other is fundamentally the mother.
38. Chodorow (*The Reproduction of Mothering*) emphasizes not only that the girl maintains her identification with the mother, but that this identification is from the outset different than the boy's, and based on a different kind of object relationship between daughter and mother.
39. Hegel, *Phänomenologie*. Hegel states that without servitude, the fear of death remains "inward and mute," but service gives it objective form.
40. Freud developed the idea of feminine masochism "as an expression of feminine nature" and the form of masochism "most accessible to our observation" in his 1924 essay, "The Economic Problem of Masochism." However, his reference was to the femininity in men, to the fantasies of male homosexuals. It remained for Marie Bonaparte (*Female Sexuality*) and Helene Deutsch to actually apply the concept in a more elaborate way to women. Deutsch (*The Psychology of Women*) went so far as to posit that women not only seek masochistic satisfaction in sexual relations with men, when they relinquish their aspiration to activity along with the wish for a penis, but also in motherhood and in the pain of childbearing. Despite Horney's ("The Problem of Feminine Masochism") excellent critique of the concept, it remained popular in psychoanalytic circles until the late sixties. It has since fallen into disrepute, as one can see in the criticism by such mainstream psychoanalysts as Harold Blum ("Masochism, the Ego Ideal, and the Psychology of Women").
41. See Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature* for an illustration of this equation.
42. Paula Caplan, "The Myth of Woman's Masochism," p. 137. Interestingly, Catherine MacKinnon, in *Feminism Unmodified*, argues that feminists should

accept women's submission as a fact, indeed, as the basic element of their heterosexual experience.

43. Caplan rightly points out that the sacrifice of motherhood is confused by Deutsch with a desire for pain, rather than the ability to bear it in the interests of a higher goal, and in support cites de Beauvoir and Blum, among others. Caplan's critique of the early theorists is good ideologically, but does not offer a particularly useful psychoanalytic exploration.

44. Excerpted from *Coming to Power*, an anthology of writings on lesbian sadomasochism. Note the book's alternate subtitle: *S/M: A Form of Eroticism Based on a Consensual Exchange of Power*.

CHAPTER 3: WOMAN'S DESIRE

1. Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex," "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes," "Female Sexuality," and the lecture on "Femininity" in *New Introductory Lectures*.
2. See Ethel Person's discussion of women's sexual difficulties in "Sexuality as the Mainstay of Identity."
3. See Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. From the viewpoint of the child, psychoanalysis argues that the preoedipal mother whose power has not yet been surrendered to the father is phallic (see Freud, "Femininity"). It is the "phallic" mother who is loved and powerful in the preoedipal era and the "castrated" mother who is repudiated by the child in the oedipal era.
4. Lazzare, *On Loving Men*, page 17.
5. See Muriel Dimen, *Surviving Sexual Contradictions*, on woman as object of desire.
6. This is true not only of explicitly feminist writing, like that of Chodorow, but of a wide range of psychoanalytic discussion. A prominent example is Irene Fast's *Gender Identity: A Differentiation Model*.

7. The most important formulation of gender identity theory was initially put forth by Robert Stoller in *Sex and Gender*. The work of Money and Erhardt, *Man and Woman, Boy and Girl*, was also important. All based their arguments on cases of ambiguous sexual development in which physiological gender identity was uncertain and psychological gender identity had to be attributed. See also Stoller's discussion, "Facts and Fancies: An Examination of Freud's Concept of Bisexuality" and "The 'Bedrock' of Masculinity and Femininity: Bisexuality"; and Money, "Gender Role, Gender Identity, Core Gender Identity: Usage and Definition of Terms." For a current evaluation of the theory of gender identity, see Person and Ovesey, "Psychoanalytic Theories of Gender Identity."

8. The work of Jean Baker Miller is a good example of this reevaluation of the mother. Since writing *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, Miller has developed a position that reevaluates women's relational self and the values, such as empathy, that go along with it (*Works in Progress* of the Stone Center).

9. The problem of woman's desire is more likely to be addressed by those who have stayed within the Freudian terms, by those influenced by Jacques Lacan, who began with the phallus as the representative of desire; they are highly sensitive to the lacuna in the representation of woman's desire, and there is a wide spectrum of positions here, from Luce Irigaray ("This Sex Which Is Not One") and Jane Gallop (*The Daughter's Seduction*), who are critical of Lacan, to Juliet Mitchell (*Psychoanalysis and Feminism*) and Jacqueline Rose (see Rose and Mitchell's introductions to *Feminine Sexuality*), who expound him.

10. Catherine MacKinnon, in *Feminism Unmodified*, thus excoriates all heterosexuality as domination. A number of feminist critics have discussed how the original feminist advocacy of emancipating sexuality has been pushed aside in favor of a moralizing stance. See Ellen Willis, "Feminism, Moralism and Pornography," and the introduction to Snitow, Stansell, and Thompson's anthology, *Powers of Desire*.

11. See Echols's critique of the idealization of the mother-daughter relationship in cultural feminism in "The New Feminism of Yin and Yang."