

On the Possibility of Penetrable Being:

Politico-Sexual Purity and the Ideal of Sovereign Integrity

‘A Woman’s Body is Like a Foreign Country,’ Rebecca Whisnant’s 2007 defense of the importance of sovereignty-claims to women’s ability to resist - and articulate resistance – to sexual appropriation, departs from the observation that violations of national and bodily sovereignty are “routinely merged in rhetoric and metaphor.” It is still not uncommon, she notes, to hear talk of ‘virgin territory,’ or troops ‘penetrating’ a particular province, expressions which are explicable, she suggests, insofar as patriarchy continues to “position[s] women as space to be invaded.” Accordingly, contra postmodern feminists like Donna Haraway’s invocation of bodily-permeability, Whisnant’s article is devoted to the proposition that claims of sovereignty “must remain central to any effective feminism” and, are “essential to the project of dismantling patriarchy and imperialism in their many interconnections.”

While accepting Whisnant’s insight that our culture continues to problematically position women as conquerable territory, the final intent of this paper will be to trouble the feminist assumption – common in popular appeals to bodily integrity and self-ownership – that women’s resistance to sexual appropriation is best exercised by redoubling the assertion of female sovereignty. This troubling springs from the conviction that the tropes of sovereign integrity are informed by a fundamentally patriarchal metaphysic which grants existence to both states and subjects only in terms of their purity and impenetrability, and that, therefore, *a priori* abnegates the possibility of (hetero)sexual female subjectivity. Without granting such subjectivity, there can be no creation of the culture of relational equality, and consent, necessary to

undermine the patterns and practices of sexual appropriation. Or as Audre Lorde once put it – famously, and far more succinctly – ‘The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House.’

We will begin, however, by mapping the contours of the trope of sovereign integrity in two very different, but nonetheless resonant sources: Andrea Dworkin’s infamous but little-read *Intercourse*, and *A European Declaration of Independence*, the ‘manifesto’ or more accurately, ‘compendium,’ produced by the Norwegian ethno-fascist, and mass-murderer, Anders Breivik. While starkly opposed in terms of political orientation and intent, what unites these texts, I suggest, is their deployment of a metaphysic which accords value to entities only on the basis of their sovereign integrity. Sovereignty, as Whisnant notes, denotes the exercise of supreme authority within a territory - it is a fundamentally spatial concept, which refers in its internal dimension to the ability to impose law on a body of people inhabiting a particular territory, and externally, to the defense of territorial boundaries and the capacity to repel outside interference in a territory’s internal affairs. The thought of sovereignty turns then, fundamentally, on the possibility of territorial integrity – it demands a given space defined and defended within a given boundary – or, as Jacques Derrida once put it, with uncharacteristic pith, ‘Sovereignty is round.’

The implications of sovereign integrity for women’s sexuality and status are nowhere made more plain than in Andrea Dworkin’s much-vilified analysis of the social meaning of intercourse. Proceeding from the unusual, but astute, assertion that “[q]uestions of metaphysics are questions of sex,” (28) Dworkin examines the way intercourse, as a transgression of physical boundaries, figures as an act of invasion,

colonization and occupation. [‘figures’/’is figured’? - Dworkin’s equivocation, natural/cultural?] “The woman in intercourse” she argues, “is a space inhabited, a literal territory occupied literally.” (168) Because, as such, “her body can be physically occupied and in that occupation taken over” woman is granted “a lesser privacy, a lesser integrity of body” and, consequently, “a lesser sense of self.” (155) The possibility of women’s subjectivity is thus, according to Dworkin’s unpacking of the logic of sovereignty, terminally undermined by their penetrability. The fact that “a woman has a body that is...in intercourse...permeable,” (154) that “she loses the capacity for integrity because the body - the basis of privacy and freedom in the material world for all human beings - is entered,” is, she argues bluntly, “the key to women’s lower human status.” (155)

It would follow from this, as it did in practice for Dworkin, that women’s social status as full human subjects can only be secured by refusing to engage in penetrative sex, and it is on this basis that Dworkin devotes an entire chapter of *Intercourse* to praising the virtue of Joan of Arc. According to Dworkin’s reading, Joan was inspired not by the “cultish worship of virginity as a feminine ideal” (105) but by a “self conscious and militant repudiation,” a “radical renunciation of a civil worthlessness rooted in real sexual practice.” (106) Her virginity, underlined by the suit of armour which “closed off” her body and rendered her sexually “inaccessible” (126) was, Dworkin suggests, the basis of “her autonomy” and “intransigent self-definition.” (105) As such, the agential power of the Maid of Orleans – like that of our own Virgin Queen - emanated from “that which was fundamental but had not yet been claimed by any woman... the right to physical privacy” which is “essential to personal freedom and self-determination.” (128)

For the purposes of this gathering, it is important to note that Dworkin attributes to Joan the belief that “the integrity of her physical body” was “synonymous with the purity of her faith,” (118) and that her “contempt for the women who followed the soldiers as consorts and prostitutes” led other Christians to view her “as pure and good in the moralistic sense.” (124) Moreover, with a view to our next – I hesitate to call him – interlocutor, it is significant that this ‘rebel virgin’ was a soldier, and, as Dworkin states, “the first French nationalist, a military liberator of an occupied country that did not yet see itself as she clearly, militantly saw it – as a political and cultural unity that must repel foreign domination.” (103)

Such a valorization of ethnic, cultural or national purity, conjoined to an open disdain for female sexuality, or more specifically, female penetrability, is a thread which also runs right through Anders Breivik’s fifteen-hundred page compendium on the imminent collapse of Western civilization. [*Digression – Compendium - Composite Figure - Breivik / Fjordman - Peder Jensen, disclosed his identity after the atrocities – Also, Melanie Phillips*] It would be misleading to attribute anything as cogent as an argument to this sprawling assortment of internet-culled conspiracy theories, apocryphal history and erroneous statistics, but it indubitably has themes. And the one I’d like to examine here, which surfaces in the introduction on how political-correctness-come-cultural-Marxism has successfully destroyed “every defensive structure of European society” and hence laid “the foundation for the Islamicisation of Europe” is the bold assertion that “[t]he fate of European civilization depends on European men steadfastly resisting Politically Correct feminism.” (31)

What interests me about this claim is that it only makes sense as an expression of the symbolic logic of sovereignty, with its constant elision of the tropes of national and sexual impregnability. The sole substantive – and I use that phrase advisedly – rationale that Breivik-Fjordman can give for linking feminism with purported Islamicisation is the fact that career women and leftist feminist types make bad breeders, and are hence responsible for a demographic collapse among the ‘indigenous’ peoples of Europe which has paved the way for mass immigration. However, the indictment of feminism which Breivik first musters in his introduction is, I think, much more revealing of what is really going on here. Feminism, by waging “psychological warfare against the European male” and turning him into a “touchy-feely subspecies” (29) has been responsible, Breivik argues, for the progressive “feminization of European culture.” (28) What he thinks he is saying with this phrase is that feminist emasculation has turned the men of our tribe into something resembling a ‘big-girl’s-blouse’ – and that consequently, they are now too weak and demoralized to protect us against external aggression. Given our continued military expenditure, as well as the fact that, whatever Breivik thinks, women are capable of defensive gestures other than using the ‘Vagina Monologues’ as a missile, this is clearly, from any position half-anchored in reality, non-sense. But what I think it does articulate is Breivik’s anxiety that feminism has, effectively, turned the once impregnable bodies of the sovereign nation states of Europe into the soft, yielding, body of a woman - that is, into a body politic that can be easily penetrated by the foreign or by the foreigner.

The symptoms of this anxiety are littered throughout the compendium. Section 2.89, which decries the position once voiced by a “stupid blonde woman author” that it is

sometimes better to “accept submission” rather than “fight” (697) is entitled ‘The Rape of Europe,’ while the feminists, Marxists and ‘suicidal humanists’ who have conspired, or perhaps we should say, collaborated, in the project of multiculturalism are indicted as ‘traitor whores.’ There are, in the course of the text, well over 150 references to rape – every one of which pertains to rape committed by Muslim men, largely against Christian or Western women. Reprising a common theme of the internet-based ‘counter-jihad’ movement, Europe is increasingly, Breivik-Fjordman contends, in the grip of Muslim rape epidemic. Because, by the ethno-sexual logic of sovereign purity, rape *within* an ethnic group does not signify, Breivik-Fjordman’s position is predicated on denying that the majority of sexual crimes against European women have always been, and continue to be, committed by European men. “The truth” Fjordman writes, with scant regard for the statistics, is “that European men have treated women with greater respect than the men of almost any other major civilization on earth,” (343) while, by contrast, “the sexual harassment and rape of non-Muslim women” as “part and parcel of Jihad,” has led to a recent explosion in sexual violence. In a piece of rape-apologia which gives the lie to his concern for his country-women’s sexual safety, this tsunami of Muslim violation is one which, Fjordman suggests, “Western women have to some extent brought upon themselves” through their willful “break[ing] down” of “men’s masculinity.” (343) In destroying the defensive invulnerability of our men-folk we have simultaneously “destroy[ed] the country,” and been turned, by Marxist-feminist indoctrination, “into a weapon of mass destruction against... [our] own civilization.” (343)

Western women’s fearsome civilization-wrecking power is also attested to in Breivik’s long excursus into “the lethal and destructive societal force” that is the “sex

and the city lifestyle” (1168) Sexual ethics, Breivik notes, with momentary neutrality, deals with “issues arising from *all* aspects of sexuality and human sexual behavior.” (1168) Its breakdown, however, is singularly “manifested through...young women’s susceptibility to have one night stands, pre-marital sex and the average amount of sexual partners for women during a lifetime.” (1170) He provides a handy chart, ranking European nation’s sexual ethics – that is, women’s promiscuity - on a scale from 0 to 100, the data for which, he explains without pause, is based “on the experiences of my network of male friends (my own included)” on “visit[ing] all these countries.” (1170) Some 50% of his female friends, he continues sadly, now fall “under the definition/category;... female sluts” because they have had 20 or more partners, a situation which is, he argues, “clearly not sustainable” if European civilization is to survive. (1172) Quite why this should be so is, surprisingly, never fully elucidated. To Breivik’s mind, it is evident that a chaos of undisciplined female flesh will inexorably cause “all social structures to completely deteriorate.” (1172) But more pertinent perhaps, is his palpable horror, shared by many who place a premium on both ethnic and sexual purity, about the threat of contagion. In the thought of sovereign purity, consenting to penetration, allowing the outside, the foreign, to come inside, is synonymous with disrupting the health and well-being of the individual body, and the body politic. It is thus that we find Breivik, in an apparent non-sequiter, moving within a matter of pages from a detailed breakdown of the “devastating” economic impact of an epidemic of sexually transmitted disease in Western Europe, to a discussion of the importance of monoculturalism and the tragedy of the “rapid extinction of the Nordic genotype.” (1182) “Marxist procreation policies,” by which he means, he clarifies, “feminism” are “deliberate genocidal

practices” resulting in the “demographical annihilation of European ethnic groups” and the concomitant “destruction of European culture.” (1157)

It would perhaps be perverse to generalize about the impact of sovereign integrity on the status of women as sexual subjects on the basis of two sources produced by individuals who, each in their own way, are renowned extremists. And yet, the valorization of pure sovereign identities is far from just a fringe phenomenon. It informs not only the current discourse on immigration across Western Europe – the resonances between the mind of a Breivik and that of a Melanie Phillips or Nigel Farage – but also our present obsession with securing our bodies, cities, homes and homelands, the motive force behind a fear-drenched decade of brutality and escalating surveillance aimed at eliminating the ineliminable, at rooting out an enemy who, as Clare Danes’ character in ‘Homeland’ confronts, is, and has ever been, always already, on the inside.

This is the truth of what Jacques Derrida tried to teach us - that the principal of sovereign identity, of the pure, fortress invulnerability of the logos, is – in ontological terms - a lie, and – in ethical terms - a downright dangerous one. In a certain sense Anders Breivik’s fevered paranoia is not entirely misplaced. Insofar as the project of Western philosophy, politics and science has been devoted to maintaining what Derrida, in *Plato’s Pharmacy*, calls the “purity of the inside,” the defensive gesture of “keep[ing] the outside out,” we, the politically-correct-postmodern-Marxist-feminists are, in fact, intent on undermining Western civilization. Not by engineering demographic collapse or an epidemic of venereal disease and brown-eyed babies, but by persistently challenging our central metaphysical conceit. ‘There is nothing outside

the text,' Derrida once said, as we have heard, ad nauseum, from those with an interest in discrediting this most unsettling of thinkers by suggesting he doubted the existence of tables and chairs, or embarked on a lifetime of prolific writing whilst believing that words mean nothing. But for all his abstruseness and play, Derrida was a singularly consistent thinker, and what he said, both in this infamous axiom, and over and over elsewhere, was that nothing - not man or woman, not sign or state - is - to return to our territorial metaphors - an island. Existence, the being of any entity, is constitutively relational, and hence, with absolute necessity, both penetrable and vulnerable. To deny this ontological fact, be it through the liberal subject's pose of rational self-sufficiency, or the colonial-patriarchal subject's gesture of unacknowledged material appropriation, is to ground a culture in spiraling domination, in a precept fundamentally at odds with the very basis of justice - the possibility of recognizing the existence and legitimate needs of that which is other than yourself.

It is for these reasons that I developed a certain suspicion about resisting women's exploitation by redeploying the rhetoric of sexual sovereignty and bodily integrity. When it comes down to it, women's bodies are not, when you think about it, actually much like foreign countries - and it is only the substrata of metaphysical metaphor informing our cultural rhetoric which makes them appear as such. The negative ramifications - and hence my reservations - about thinking women's bodies, and their sexual self-determination, according to a logic of sovereign integrity are many, and cannot be fully explored here. But I will end by returning briefly to my title. As I have demonstrated here, the manifestations of sovereignty-thinking, are, at core, linked together by the metaphor of territorial integrity, and the valorization of its

impenetrable purity. And, as such, they have committed the Western mind to understanding the being of a self-determining subject in spatial terms, as a well-defended, indeed, im-preg-nable, entity. According to this thought, being a subject simply *is* to be impenetrable, and hence, a penetrable subject is oxymoronic – which is to say, there is no such thing as a heterosexual female person. As an analysis of the implications of our cultural rhetoric, Dworkin was right – although she erred, I would argue, insofar as she assumed its necessity. As Bergson suggested with reference to Zeno’s paradox, if you end up with an absurd conclusion – in this case, that heterosexual female subjects do not exist – this tells you, not that the conclusion is right, but that something has gone very wrong in the way the problem is being represented. Moreover, in practical terms, all the while we draw on a metaphysical inheritance which conceives penetration as a profound abnegation of personhood, there can be no possibility of creating a widespread practice of meaningful consent so central to undermining rape culture; for what kind of person would willingly consent – without the application of flattery, or coercion, without generous doses of alcohol – to engage in an activity which signifies the erasure of her existence as a human being? It may be, for many of us, an uncomfortable truth that we are all, even those not culturally-coded as such, beings constituted by the constant passage of matter and ideas across our bodily boundaries. But while it may be hard, we are, I think, ethically impelled – especially on behalf of all that is materially appropriated – to start thinking our existence in ways which assume, and indeed, embrace, the vulnerability, and the implied responsibility, of this fact.