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On the Gynecology of Morals: Nietzsche and Cixous on the Logic of the Gift

A gift-giving virtue is the highest virtue.
—Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Desire knows nothing of exchange, *it knows only theft and gift.*
—Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*

Who could ever think of the gift as a gift-that-takes? Who else but man, precisely the one who would like to take everything?
—Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa"

Gynecology, the *logia* of the *gynaeco,* can mean either the science of women or the discourse of women. It is the latter sense, with its double genitive uncertainty, that I wish to recall in the title of this paper, although the punning on the title of one of Nietzsche's most important texts is not meant only to suggest that women speak differently about morals than do men.[1] This point has been at the center of the feminist challenges to the traditional discourses of ethics since the appearance of Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* if not before.[2] Rather than focus on morals, I want instead to address an issue raised in the works of Hélène Cixous, among others, namely, that women speak and think differently about economies (libidinal, textual, political) than do men. In addressing this issue, whose scope and importance far exceeds what can be discussed adequately in a short paper, I will focus on several points concerning exchange and appropriation in an effort to show how Cixous develops certain insights that exist in germinal form in Nietzsche's works.

I should say at the outset that in the following remarks, I do not intend to discuss Nietzsche's various comments about women, "woman" or the

"feminine." Whether or not Nietzsche's comments are themselves misogynistic is not an issue I will address, although I will confess that many of his remarks on women and his frequent use of "feminine" as a defamatory qualifier are, to say the least, disturbing. That one can paint a picture of Nietzsche as a misogynist is clear. And it is equally clear that one can construct an interpretation that explains, or explains away, many of the most offensive of Nietzsche's remarks about women.[3] In the present discussion, I am interested neither in condemning Nietzsche's misogyny nor apologizing for it. Such efforts, when done well, can be useful and important. My interest in "Nietzsche and the feminine" lies elsewhere. It has long been recognized that Nietzsche, whose perspectives can at times be those of the worst of nineteenth-century prejudices, is also able to give voice to insights that now a century later are still at the forefront of critical reflection. Rather than look at Nietzsche's remarks on women, I want instead to explore a theme in Nietzsche's works to which insufficient attention has been paid. This theme pertains to a possible distinction between what one might call a masculine and a feminine economy, and the locus of this distinction is centered around different ways to understand property, appropriation, generosity, exchange—what I am here calling the logic of the gift. Although not specifically connected to gender in Nietzsche's texts, setting Nietzsche's discussion of gifts and giftgiving alongside Cixous's will highlight what one might want to regard as an unacknowledged feminine side of Nietzsche's economic discourse. By examining the exchange model and the definition of subjectivity in terms of the acquisition of property that accompanies this model, and experimenting with another model based on an economy of generosity that in different ways is suggested by both Nietzsche and Cixous, we will be addressing issues whose importance extends far beyond the margins of these particular authors' texts. It is in part toward proceeding with this thought-experiment, imagining what intersubjective relations might look like if grounded on practices of generosity rather than reciprocal exchange, that the present paper seeks to put Nietzsche and Cixous into dialogue.

"The great book of modern ethnology," Deleuze and Guattari write in *Anti-Oedipus,* "is not so much Mauss's *The Gift* as Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals.*"[4] In the second essay of the *Genealogy,* Nietzsche turns to the origins of guilt and bad conscience and, in so doing, he offers his own "myth" of human beings' departure from the "state of nature." "The oldest and most primitive personal relationship," Nietzsche writes, is "that between buyer and seller, creditor and debtor" (KSA 5:305–6;

GM—II §8, p. 70). The moral concept "guilt," conceived as a debt that is essentially unredeemable, has its origin in the economic-legal notion of a debt as something that can and should be repaid. We can see this in the origin of punishment, which as retribution emerges from the inability to repay the debt. Because " 'everything has its price [and] *all* things can be paid for' " (KSA 5:306; GM—II §8, p. 70), the debtors, having made a promise to repay and now being unable to make that payment directly, are obligated to offer a substitute payment of something they possess: their body, their spouse, their freedom, even their life. *Schuld,* debt/guilt, thus operates within a strange logic of compensation which seeks to establish equivalences between the creditor and the debtor.

Like guilt, obligation, and punishment, Nietzsche also sees the origin of justice residing in the relationship between creditor and debtor. This primitive contractual relationship made possible the comparative evaluation of relative worth, and the focus on the perspective of measured value allowed primitive society to arrive at "the oldest and naïvest moral canon of *justice* [*Gerechtigkeit*], the beginning of all 'good-naturedness,' all 'fairness,' all 'good will,' all 'objectivity' on earth" (KSA 5:306; GM—II §8, p. 70)—the *jus talionis:* "an eye for an eye." In the preface to the *Genealogy,* Nietzsche refers us to several passages in his earlier works where he treats subjects to which he here returns. One of these, entitled "*The Origin of Justice* [*Ursprung der Gerechtigkeit*]," offers a succinct summary of Nietzsche's view of the egoistic and economic origin of justice:

> Justice (fairness) originates between parties of approximately *equal power*. . . : where there is no clearly recognizable superiority of force and a contest would result in mutual injury producing no decisive outcome the idea arises of coming to an understanding and negotiating over one another's demands: the characteristic of *exchange* is the original characteristic of justice. Each satisfies the other, inasmuch as each acquires what he values more than the other does. One gives to the other what he wants to have, to be henceforth his own, and in return receives what one oneself desires. Justice is thus requital and exchange under the presupposition of an approximately equal power position: revenge therefore belongs originally within the domain of justice, it is an exchange. Gratitude likewise. (KSA 2:89; HH §92, p. 49)

This initial canon of justice, based on economic principles of universal exchange and equivalency, gave rise to communities that operated on the assumption that equal settlements between individuals were always possible and morally obligatory.

The evolution of society saw the creditor-debtor relationship extended from a moral guideline among individuals to the standard that dictated

the relationship between individuals and the community itself. The community stands in relation to its members as a creditor to its debtors (KSA 5:307; GM—II §9, p. 71), and to break the laws of the community will entail a future payment of that debt (punishment understood as "a debt paid to society"). In primitive, insecure, and unstable societies, Nietzsche claims, debts had to be repaid in accordance with the primitive canon of justice, the *jus talionis.* But as a community gained in strength, he sees emerging a new notion of justice. The creditor, now confident of its wealth/strength, might measure its wealth precisely in terms of how much injury it could endure without suffering and feeling the compulsion to respond. The self-overcoming of the old model of justice that demanded equal payment for debts incurred has "given itself a beautiful name—*mercy* [*Gnade*]": "It is not unthinkable that a society might attain such a *consciousness of power* that it could allow itself the noblest luxury possible to it—letting those who harm it go *unpunished.* 'What are my parasites to me?' it might say. 'May they live and prosper: I am strong enough for that!' The justice which began with 'everything is dischargeable, everything must be discharged,' ends by winking and letting those incapable of discharging their debt go free; it ends, as does every good thing on earth, by *overcoming itself.*" (KSA 5:309; GM—II §10, pp. 72–73).

This image of strength as the ability to actively forget and forgive the debts one is owed, to endure petty injury without reacting, to withhold punishment, is a recurring image in Nietzsche's texts. Earlier in the *Genealogy,* it is offered as a fundamental contrast to ressentiment. The men of ressentiment react negatively to external conditions, but lacking the strength to act, they are forced to take refuge in the imagination. Unable to act, and unable to forget the "harm" done to them by the outside, ressentiment festers in the weak and poisons their thinking. When they are finally prompted to create, these men of ressentiment can only create a system of diseased values that reflects their decadent desires. On the other hand, when ressentiment does appear in noble and strong individuals, and it does on rare occasions, its harmfulness is mitigated by their ability to act directly. But what is more likely the case with noble individuals is that ressentiment does not appear at all because they have the strength to actively forget what displeases them: "To be incapable of taking one's enemies, one's accidents, even one's misdeeds seriously for very long—that is the sign of strong, full natures in whom there is an excess of power to form, to mold, to recuperate, and to forget" (KSA 5:273; GM—I §10, p. 39).

This strength to forget will promote the "deliverance from revenge" which Zarathustra teaches is "the bridge to the highest hope" (KSA 4:128;

Z p. 211). Where the preachers of equality proclaim the necessity of revenge, Zarathustra teaches that "to *me,* justice speaks thus: 'Men are not equal.' Nor shall they become equal! What would my love of the *Übermensch* be if I spoke otherwise?" (KSA 4:130; Z p. 213). In *Daybreak,* Nietzsche envisions a time when revenge and the law of equal return will no longer be the principle of justice to which society appeals: "At present, to be sure, he who has been injured, irrespective of how this injury is to be made good, will still desire his *revenge* and will turn for it to the courts—and for the time being the courts continue to maintain our detestable criminal codes with their shopkeeper's scales and the *desire to counterbalance guilt with punishment:* but can we not get beyond this?" (KSA 3:177; D §202, p. 121). To overcome the old instinct for revenge, and with it to get rid of the concepts of sin and punishment, will be for Nietzsche a sign of the health of a community. A healthy community will be characterized not by revenge but by generosity, which will be evaluated "according to how many parasites it can endure" (KSA 3:178; D §202, p. 122).[5]

To summarize the preceding discussion, we find Nietzsche isolating two types of economy that give rise to two types of justice. The lower, baser, slave economy is grounded on the law of equal returns: justice demands that all debts be paid in kind; the creditor is not capable of forgetting the debt, and the debtor is obliged to return some equivalent form of payment. This notion of justice, exhibited in the *jus talionis,* operates in those societies whose economies depend on rules of exchange. Nietzsche's theorizing, in fact, is supported by the account provided by Marcel Mauss's *Essai sur le don:* a "genuine," "free," "unencumbered" gift is not possible.[6] Instead, gifts are given in a social setting whose "rules" obligate the receiver to return the gift in kind, that is, to offer in return a countergift of equivalent value. This does not conflate giftgiving with barter, however, for the former has an essential diachronic dimension (the passage of some determinate amount of time) which the latter lacks. Nevertheless, the principle of equivalent exchange underlies and makes possible the transactions in either a barter or a giftgiving relationship.

The higher, nobler economy that Nietzsche sketches is based on a fundamentally different principle, one closer to what Bataille called a "general economy" of "expenditure" than to a simple, restricted exchange economy.[7] Nietzsche's higher economy is one grounded in excess strength sufficient to squander its resources if it so chooses. In the foreground of this noble economy "is the feeling of fullness, of power that seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of wealth that would

give [*schenken*] and bestow [*abgeben*]: the noble human being, too, helps the unfortunate, but not, or almost not, from pity, but prompted more by an urge begotten by excess of power [*Überfluss von Macht*]" (KSA 5:209–10; BGE §260, p. 205). In this economy, gifts can be given without expectation of return and debts can be forgiven without penalty or shame.[8] Justice here can but need not demand repayment; tempered with mercy, it is empowered to forgive and forget what it is due. We see this higher justice and "general economy" most clearly at two points in Nietzsche's texts: in the relationships between Zarathustra and those to whom he offers his teachings and in the relationship between Nietzsche and the readers to whom he offers his texts.

When Zarathustra first goes down from his cave to rejoin humanity, like the bee that has gathered too much honey or the cup that wants to overflow, he is overfull and needs to locate those to whom he can bring the gift of his teaching (see Z—Prologue §§1–3). Initially, as the hermit who meets him along the way predicted, Zarathustra encounters only those who are suspicious of the gifts he brings. Soon enough the situation changes, however. Zarathustra quickly comes to stand in relation to his followers as a giver of gifts, and his followers are only too eager to receive his teachings as gifts from on high. But unlike his followers, Zarathustra knows the dangers involved in giftgiving, for the receivers of gifts often feel beholden to the one who gave to them. Zarathustra thus cautions:

> Great indebtedness does not make men grateful, but vengeful; and if a little charity is not forgotten, it turns into a gnawing worm.
>
> "Be reserved in accepting! Distinguish by accepting!" Thus I advise those who have nothing to give.
>
> But I am a giver of gifts: I like to give, as a friend to friends. Strangers, however, and the poor may themselves pluck the fruit from my tree: that will cause them less shame. (KSA 4:114; Z p. 201)

To be able to give gifts rightly is an "*art* [*Kunst*]" (see KSA 4:333–37; Z pp. 380–84), and great care and skill are required in order to prevent feelings of indebtedness in the receivers. One repays one's teacher badly if one remains only a student, Zarathustra tells his followers in his speech "On the Gift-Giving Virtue" at the end of part 1, as he urges them to lose him and find themselves (KSA 4:101; Z p. 186). To remain a student is to return the teacher's gifts in kind, either by simple obedience to the teacher's lessons or by presenting the teacher with a comparable gift in return. Neither response takes the gift freely and with forgetfulness of its origin, neither receives the gift with mercy (*Erbarmen*). For Zarathustra, overfull with wisdom, giving is a necessity (*Nothdurft*) (see KSA 4:279; Z

p. 335), and while his followers will return eternally to the words of their teacher, the return on Zarathustra's gifts will not return to him. "I do not know the happiness of those who receive. . . . This is my poverty, that my hand never rests from giving" (KSA 4:136; Z p. 218). His gift, to be sure, is an investment, but an investment in a future that he will not share and from which he will not derive profit.

We see a similar relationship exhibited with respect to the "presents" Nietzsche gives to his readers in the form of his texts. With *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* Nietzsche "has given humanity the greatest present [*das grösste Geschenk*] that has ever been made to it so far" (KSA 6:259; EH—P §4, p. 219*). In the preface to *Ecce Homo,* Nietzsche refers to his texts of the last quarter of 1888 (*The Antichrist, Twilight of the Idols, Dionysus Dithyrambs*) as "presents" (*Geschenke*), and *Ecce Homo* itself is a present Nietzsche makes to himself on the occasion of his forty-fourth birthday. What is to be done with these presents? Are they to be returned to their author in the same condition that he delivered them? Or are they to be made use of, not to be returned but to be put to use in the production of other gifts? For Nietzsche, the goal of the writer is to stimulate, not to be consumed: "We honor the great artists of the past less through that unfruitful awe which allows every word, every note, to lie where it has been put than we do through active endeavors to help them to come repeatedly to life again" (KSA 2:431–32; HH—"Assorted Opinions and Maxims" §126, p. 242). Good philosophical writing should inspire one to action and, Nietzsche writes, "I consider every word behind which there does not stand such a challenge to action to have been written in vain" (KSA 1:413; UM p. 184). Nietzsche does not so much want to be understood as to incite. His writings are incendiary devices: he speaks "no longer with words but with lightning bolts" (KSA 6:320; EH p. 281). He seeks readers who will not be mere consumers of his texts but experimenters (*Versucher*), "monster[s] of courage and curiosity; moreover, supple, cunning, cautious; born adventurer[s] and discoverer[s]" (KSA 6:303; EH p. 264). He seeks, in other words, to free his readers from the constraints of a textual economy that demands that they occupy a place as passive beneficiary/consumer of the text rather than its active coproducer. Which is to say, he seeks to write within a textual economy that does not guarantee the author any return on his or her gift as it is disseminated through an intertextual field.[9]

To write, and live, within a textual/libidinal/political economy freed from the constraints of the law of return is part of Hélène Cixous's vision of a postpatriarchal future, and Cixous's comments bring to the fore a

"feminine" side of Nietzsche's economic reflections.[10] Cixous suggests we distinguish between two kinds of economies, two kinds of writing, two kinds of spending, two kinds of giving. One, grounded on the law of return, finds its philosophical justification in Locke's definition of property in chapter five of the *Second Treatise of Government:* one possesses and has a right to as one's private property whatever "he removes out of the state that nature hath provided and left it in [and] he hath mixed his labor with." This account of property and the practices which it underwrites find themselves instantiated throughout what has counted as "History." The other set of practices, only recently voiced, also has a long history, but one that has until recently not been acknowledged "publicly" because it only concerned "women." To be sure, Nietzsche does not acknowledge the practices of this other economy as feminine. In fact, on those few occasions when he does engender his economic reflections, more often than not and in the most traditional of ways, he associates giving with the feminine and possession with the masculine, as for example when he writes that man has a "lust for possession" and man's "love consists of wanting to *have* and not of renunciation and giving away," while "woman gives herself away" and "wants to be taken and accepted as a possession" (KSA 3:611–12; GS §363, pp. 319–20). Nevertheless, Cixous does obliquely connect her remarks to Nietzsche's through the mediating effect of Jacques Derrida. In "The Laugh of the Medusa," upon introducing "the whole deceptive problematic of the gift," she suggests in a footnote that the reader "re-read Derrida's text, 'Le Style de la femme.' "[11] Of particular significance to Cixous is Derrida's identifying the gift, in Nietzsche, as "the essential predicate of woman,"[12] and she, like several other feminists who have written "on" Derrida, brings to our attention gifts and giftgiving as a central and recurrent Derridean theme from *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles,*[13] where the gift is linked specifically to "woman," to *The Post Card,* in which Derrida addresses issues surrounding giving and the gift in terms of *envois* and their failure to arrive at their destinations, the giving and return of the *fort/da* in Freud, the giving/theft of the letter in Poe, and the *es gibt* of *Sein* and *Ereignis* in Heidegger.[14]

According to Cixous, current economic realities operate within what she calls "*L'Empire du Propre,*" the "Empire of the Selfsame/Proper."[15] She identifies the philosophical underpinnings of this empire with Hegel, who in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* framed the fundamental relationship between self and other in terms of the acquisition of property: the subject goes "out into the other *in order to come back* to itself."[16] The phallocentric desire that animates the Hegelian dialectic of self and other is a

desire for appropriation: one confronts the other as different and unequal and one seeks to make the other one's own. The desire to possess, to receive a return on one's investments, animates an economy that Cixous suggests we call "masculine," in part because it "is erected from a fear that, in fact, is typically masculine"—the fear of castration—"the fear of expropriation, of separation, of losing the attribute" (*NBW*, p. 80). Cixous summarizes her point succinctly in the following remark:

> Etymologically, the "proper" is "property," that which is not separable from me. Property is proximity, nearness: we must love our neighbors, those close to us, as ourselves: we must draw close to the other so that we may love him/her, because we love ourselves most of all. The realm of the proper, culture, functions by the appropriation articulated, set into play, by man's classic fear of seeing himself expropriated, seeing himself deprived . . . by his refusal to be deprived, in a state of separation, by his fear of losing the prerogative, fear whose response is all of History. Everything must return to the masculine. "Return": the economy is founded on a system of returns. If a man spends and is spent, it's on condition that his power returns. If a man should go out to the other, it's always done according to the Hegelian model, the model of the master-slave dialectic.[17]

Economies of the *propre,* proper economies, economies based on the possession of private property, are structured around the fear of loss, the fear of losing what is already possessed. The fear of expropriation thus drives the desire for appropriation which Cixous designates with the qualifier "masculine." This designation, she quickly adds, does not name the biological male, and to speak of "masculine" or "feminine" economies is not to fall into essentialism. "Words like 'masculine' and 'feminine' that circulate everywhere and that are completely distorted in everyday usage,—words which refer, of course, to a classical vision of sexual opposition between men and women—are our burden, that is what burdens us. As I often said, my work in fact aims at getting rid of words like 'feminine' and 'masculine,' 'femininity' and 'masculinity,' even 'man' and 'woman,' which designate that which cannot be classified inside of a signifier except by force and violence and which goes beyond it in any case."[18] She is sometimes led to speak of "the *so-called feminine economy*" in order to indicate that women do not necessarily operate according to this type of economy. In fact, "one can find these two economies in no matter which individual."[19] For this reason Cixous herself prefers the language of bisexuality, "that is to say, the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes, evident and insistent in different ways according to the individual, the nonexclusion of difference or of a sex" (*NBW*, p. 85).

Although she prefers the language of bisexuality and she frequently cautions against the dangers of resorting to the classical binaries of feminine/masculine or femininity/masculinity, she continues nevertheless to use the qualifiers "masculine" and "feminine" in reference to economies because "the (political) economy of the masculine and the feminine is organized by different demands and constraints, which, as they become socialized and metaphorized, produce signs, relations of power, relationships of production and reproduction, a whole huge system of cultural inscription that is legible as masculine or feminine" (*NBW*, pp. 80–81). Guided by the prime directive to appropriate, what a masculine economy is not truly capable of is giving. Inscribed under the law of return, the masculine gift expects, nay demands a return, as Mauss's *Essai sur le don* demonstrated.[20] Rephrasing the insights of Mauss and Nietzsche in terms of a gendered unconscious, Cixous notes the lack of ease with which a masculine economy confronts generosity: "Giving: there you have a basic problem, which is that masculinity is always associated—in the unconscious, which is after all what makes the whole economy function—with debt" ("CD," p. 48). Freud showed the effects that this debt has on the child, who must confront the obligation to repay his parents for their gift of his life. If you are a man, nothing is more dangerous than to be obligated to another's generosity: "For the moment you receive something you are effectively 'open' to the other, and if you are a man you have only one wish": to return the gift as quickly as possible ("CD," p. 48).

Escaping from the openness to the other has driven masculine exchange practices which, grounded on opposition, hierarchy, and a Hegelian struggle for mastery, "can end only in at least one death (one master—one slave, or two nonmasters = two dead)" ("Laugh," p. 893*). Although these practices arose in a time "governed by phallocentric values," Cixous argues that another system of exchange is possible. The fact that the period of phallocentric values "extends into the present doesn't prevent woman from starting the history of life somewhere else. Elsewhere, she gives. She doesn't 'know' what she's giving, she doesn't measure it; she gives, though, neither a counterfeit impression nor something she hasn't got. She gives more, with no assurance that she'll get back even some unexpected profit from what she puts out. She gives that there may be life, thought, transformation. This is an 'economy' that can no longer be put in economic terms" ("Laugh," p. 893). A "feminine" "economy," one no longer understandable in classical "exchangist" economic terms, allows for the possibility of giving without expectation of return, for giving that is truly generous: it gives without trying to "recover its ex-

penses. . . . If there is a *propre* to woman, paradoxically it is her capacity to de-propriate herself without self-interest" (*NBW*, p. 87*). Although brought up in a social space framed by debt, "one can ask oneself about the possibility of a real gift, a pure gift, a gift that would not be annulled by what one could call a countergift."[21] Cixous is quick to point out, however, that "there is no 'free' gift. You never give something for nothing. But all the difference lies in the why and how of the gift, in the values that the gesture of giving affirms, causes to circulate; in the type of profit the giver draws from the gift and the use to which he or she puts it" (*NBW*, p. 87). Where masculine economies can make only quid pro quo exchanges by means of which a direct profit is to be recouped, feminine economies transact their business differently. They are not constrained to giving as a means of deferred exchange in order to obligate a countergift in return, but encourage giving as an affirmation of generosity. A feminine libidinal economy, she writes, "is an economy which has a more supple relation to property, which can stand separation and detachment, which signifies that it can also stand freedom—for instance, the other's freedom."[22] It is an economy, in other words, in which direct profit can be deferred, perhaps infinitely, in exchange for the continued circulation of giving.

To put this another way, we can perhaps use a distinction drawn by C. A. Gregory and say that whereas a feminine economy is an economy based on the exchange of gifts, a masculine economy is an economy based on the exchange of commodities. Gregory distinguishes between the two types of exchange in the following way: "Commodity exchange establishes objective quantitative relationships between the objects transacted, while gift exchange establishes personal qualitative relationships between the subjects transacting."[23] Where commodity exchange is focused on a transfer in which objects of equivalent exchange-value are reciprocally transacted, gift exchange seeks to establish a relationship between subjects in which the actual objects transferred are incidental to the value of the relationship established. Commodity exchange thus exhibits the values which, for example, Gilligan associates with an ethic of rights based on abstract principles of reciprocity, while gift exchange exhibits the forming of and focus on relationships which she associates with an ethic of care based on interpersonal needs and responsibilities, an ethic which speaks in a voice different from the one which has heretofore dominated the moral tradition.

Because of its "more supple relation to property," Cixous also emphasizes the difference between feminine and masculine economies insofar as the former promote the establishing of relationships through the giving of

gifts. In particular, she draws our attention to maternal gifts as ones which escape the logic of appropriation that structures the commodity economy she labels masculine. Mother and child do not stand in a relationship of self/other, opposing parties with competing interests, and the gift to the child of a mother's love or a mother's breast is not comprehensible in terms of quantifiable exchange-values or the law of return that governs an economy based on the exchange of commodities. Nor are these maternal gifts understandable in terms of the fear of expropriation, for the mother is willing to expend these gifts without reserve or expectation of return. In fact, like Nietzsche, Cixous emphasizes and affirms the positive value of plenitude: insofar as the mother can supply as much love or as much milk as the child might demand, Cixous articulates a set of economic principles that refuse to accept the modern assumption of the givenness of conditions of scarcity. Cixous encourages us to understand this ability to give that animates feminine (libidinal) economy in terms of maternity and the specificity of women's bodies: insofar as women have the potential to give birth/life to another, they have an anatomically grounded relationship that makes possible their experiencing "the not-me within me" (*NBW*, p. 90). While Cixous tethers this relationship to pregnancy, lactation, and childbearing, at the same time she wants to link it to the possibility of writing. "Woman is body more than man is. . . . More body, hence more writing" (*NBW*, p. 95).

> It is not only a question of the feminine body's extra resource, this specific power to produce some thing living of which her flesh is the locus, not only a question of a transformation of rhythms, exchanges, of relationship to space, of the whole perceptive system, but also of the irreplaceable experience of those moments of stress, of the body's crises, of that work that goes on peacefully for a long time only to burst out in that surpassing moment, the time of childbirth. In which she lives as if she were larger or stronger than herself. It is also the experience of a "bond" with the other, all that comes through in the metaphor of bringing into the world. How could the woman, who has experienced the not-me within me, not have a particular relationship to the written? To writing as giving itself away (cutting itself off) from the source? (*NBW*, p. 90)

Elsewhere, she articulates women's writing more specifically in terms of generosity:

> The question a woman's text asks is the question of giving—"What does this writing give?" "How does it give?" And talking about non-origin and beginnings, you might say it "gives a send-off" [*donne le départ*]. Let's take the expression "giving a send-off" in a metaphorical

> sense: giving a send-off is generally giving the *signal* to depart. I think it's more than giving the departure signal, it's really giving, making a *gift* of, departure, allowing departure, allowing breaks, "parts," partings, separations . . . from this we break with the return-to-self, with the specular relations ruling the coherence, the identification, of the individual. ("CD," p. 53)

To put the issue this way comes dangerously close to the sort of "essentialist ideological interpretation" that Cixous acknowledges is "a story made to order for male privilege" (*NBW*, p. 81).[24] Yet she willingly runs this risk, as she frequently appeals to maternal and anatomical images and metaphors in expressing the implications of feminine economies and *écriture féminine*. Whether or not Cixous herself sometimes falls victim to essentialist thinking when she focuses on the anatomical specificity of women's bodies in terms of the possibilities of pregnancy and childbirth, one could, perhaps less problematically, ground the practices of feminine economies and writing sociohistorically rather than anatomically. To do so would perhaps focus attention on those maternal practices discussed by Cixous as *exemplary* of different intersubjective relations that warrant further generalization and application while avoiding becoming entangled in the problems raised by either the culturally constraining aspects of maternity or the appeal to anatomical specificity. Cixous herself appears to make this move when she replaces "*écriture féminine*" ("feminine writing") with "*écriture dite féminine*" ("writing said to be feminine"): "It is not anatomical sex that determines anything here. It is, on the contrary, history from which one never escapes, individual and collective history, the cultural schema and the way the individual negotiates with these schema, with these data, adapts to them and reproduces them, or else gets round them, overcomes them, goes beyond them, gets through them" ("EF," p. 18). To speak of a feminine economy, Cixous writes, "does not refer to women, but perhaps to a trait that comes back to women more often."[25] Insofar as women have been prohibited throughout history from possessing things for themselves, they have come to understand and appreciate property differently in terms of an economy based not on the law of return but on generosity. Likewise, insofar as women have at times been positioned socioeconomically *as* gifts, it is not at all surprising, nor should it be taken as a function of anatomy or biology, that women's perspectives on gifts and giving might differ from men's.[26] By virtue of certain social necessities, Cixous writes in "The Laugh of the Medusa," women constitute themselves as " 'person[s]' capable of losing a part of [themselves] without losing [their] integrity" ("Laugh," p. 888). They are able to exist in a

"relationship to the other in which the gift doesn't calculate its influence" (*NBW*, p. 92). And they can negotiate within an economy "that tolerates the movements of the other."[27] They have learned, to use a distinction made by Pierre Bourdieu in his critique of Lévi-Strauss's analysis of gift exchange, to distinguish "giving" from "swapping" or "lending." This distinction is central to Bourdieu's critique of objectivist anthropological accounts of gift exchange. By reducing the exchange of gift and countergift to a straightforward transfer of commodities of relatively equal worth, the objectivist account conflates gift exchange with "*swapping*, which . . . telescopes gift and counter-gift into the same instant, and . . . *lending*, in which the return of the loan is explicitly guaranteed by a juridical act and contract capable of ensuring that the acts it prescribes are predictable and calculable."[28] According to Bourdieu, the reality of the gift exchange presupposes both the necessity of a deferred and different countergift *and* the "(individual and collective) misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) of the reality of the objective 'mechanism' of the exchange."[29]

Unlike Bourdieu, Cixous is not content with describing current giftgiving practices in terms of a misrecognition of what is in reality reciprocal exchange. Instead, she wants to retrieve giftgiving from the economic necessities imposed upon it within an exchangist economy and to reframe the practices of giving in an account that does not imprison transactions within private proprietary relationships in which loans and loans paid back masquerade as the bestowal of gifts. In so doing, certain heretofore unrealized opportunities emerge. In Cixous's idiom, women have learned how to exceed the limits of themselves and enter into the between of self and other without losing themselves in the process. Escaping the proprietary constraints on subjectivity is what makes possible *écriture féminine:* "Writing is working; being worked; questioning (in) the between (letting oneself be questioned) of same *and* of other without which nothing lives; undoing death's work by willing the togetherness of one-another, infinitely charged with a ceaseless exchange of one with another—not knowing one another and beginning again only from what is most distant, from self, from other, from the other within. A course that multiplies transformations by the thousands" (*NBW*, p. 86). To be sure, men too know how to question/be questioned in the between of self and other, and Cixous readily admits that some men (she names, among others, Kleist, Shakespeare, Genet, Kafka) have written *écriture féminine*. Similarly, because most women "have been subjected to the obligations of masculinization in order to hoist themselves on to the scene of socio-political legitimation, . . . most of the texts by women up to our own time have been terribly marked

by the 'masculine' economy" ("EF," p. 25). To recognize these gender correlations is not to fall victim to some tired old essentialism, and Cixous cautions against so interpreting such "facts" of literary history, for what counts as "man" or "woman" is a historical-cultural construct: "There is 'destiny' no more than there is 'nature' or 'essence' as such. . . . Men and women are caught up in a web of age-old cultural determinations that are almost unanalyzable in their complexity. One can no more speak of 'woman' than of 'man' without being trapped within an ideological theater . . . [which] invalidate[s] in advance any conceptualization" (*NBW*, p. 83). Which is to say that radical transformations of gender relations and identities, accompanied by transformations in libidinal economies, are possible: "Then 'femininity' and 'masculinity' would inscribe quite differently their effects of difference, their economy, their relationship to expenditure, to lack, to the gift. What today appears to be 'feminine' or 'masculine' would no longer amount to the same thing. No longer would the common logic of difference be organized with the opposition that remains dominant. Difference would be a bunch of new differences" (*NBW*, p. 83).

"We are forgetting how to give presents," Adorno wrote in *Minima Moralia*.[30] Cixous seeks a place "where it was not impossible or pathetic to be generous" (*NBW*, p. 72). Nietzsche envisions a society with a level of power sufficient to allow it to be merciful, that is, sufficient for it to allow its debts to go unpaid. To be sure, Nietzsche does not identify this society with the feminine, nor does he associate the generosity of overfullness with the feminine. In fact, the reverse is more nearly the case: the degree of strength necessary for such generosity is almost always put forward in masculine images of mastery, virility, productivity, and activity. But need this have been the case? I think not. By setting Nietzsche's discussion of plenitude and generosity together with Cixous's discussion of feminine libidinal economies and the giving of gifts, I have tried to show some of the affinities between their respective accounts. Perhaps we might look upon Cixous as the sort of reader Nietzsche was seeking, one who would pay him back not by repeating his text, but by taking that text and making it her own, putting it to use as she sees fit. Perhaps this is what Cixous calls *voler, theft/flight*, an other/the other side of giving: "To fly/steal [*voler*] is woman's gesture, to steal into language to make it fly. We have all learned flight/theft, the art with many techniques, for all the centuries we have only had access to having by stealing/flying; we have lived in a flight/theft, stealing/flying, finding the close, concealed ways-through

of desire. It's not just luck if the word 'voler' volleys between the 'vol' of theft and the 'vol' of flight, pleasuring in each and routing the sense police" (*NBW*, p. 96). Is this not what Cixous is doing when she provides an account of generosity that does not require *übermenschliche* strength to enact as she replaces the masterly indifference affirmed by Nietzsche with maternal compassion? By recasting the economic insights of Nietzsche and Mauss in terms of sexual difference, and by making it possible to see the gendered dimension of giftgiving which Nietzsche too quickly discarded, Cixous articulates an alternative logic of the gift, one with several advantages over more classical exchangist logics. As anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and historians have shown, we find more women than men engaged in cultural practices that can be construed as generous. Cixous gives voice to this empirical finding while showing that generosity has always been an option of which, for complex social and historical reasons, men have not sufficiently availed themselves.

If an economy or ethic of generosity is deemed worth pursuing and cultivating, as I have tried to suggest in terms of the ideas of Nietzsche and Cixous, then we must take care to develop economic and ethical practices that draw on the lived experiences of women without, as perhaps Cixous and Nietzsche each in their own way have done, "reifying women's social identities under stereotypes of femininity, on the one hand, [or] dissolving them into sheer nullity and oblivion, on the other."[31] And we must take care also to insure that the practices of generosity are generalized and become the behavioral norms throughout the social matrix. For if they do not, if the practices of giving are enacted only by some, these practices will continue to be exploitative of those who give without return, as they have heretofore always been. Avoiding this eventuality calls for another dimension of the logic of the gift, one which neither Nietzsche nor Cixous sufficiently attend to, namely, the dimension of social action and activism. Attention to this dimension is the task that now confronts us.

Notes

This paper has benefited from the careful reading and thoughtful suggestions of several people, including Caroline Gebhard, Paula Smith, Johanna Meehan, Jill Schrift, Aletta Biersack, Debra Bergoffen, and Marcia Stephenson. Although most of these readers no doubt still have questions concerning my approach to the issues raised in this paper, I thank them for the generous gift of their time and their criticisms, which made this a better paper than it would otherwise have been. Research for this article was supported by the Harris Faculty Fellowship of Grinnell College, and an undis-

turbed setting for its writing was provided by the University of Oregon Humanities Center.

1. This pun was, in fact, suggested to me by Avital Ronell's reference to a "gynecologist of morals" in her "Namely, Eckermann," in *Looking after Nietzsche,* ed. Laurence A. Rickels (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), p. 236.

2. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982).

3. In addition to several of the essays in this collection, the reader interested in discussions of Nietzsche as or as not a misogynist is referred to Luce Irigaray, *Amante marine: De Friedrich Nietzsche* (Paris: Minuit, 1980); Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche et la scène philosophique* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1979), especially chapter 8: "Baubô: Perversion théologique et Fétichisme," pp. 263–304 (a translation of this chapter by Tracy B. Strong appears in *Nietzsche's New Seas: Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Politics,* ed. Tracy B. Strong and Michael Allen Gillespie [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988], pp. 175–202); Elizabeth Berg, "The Third Woman," *Diacritics* 12 (Summer 1982): 11–20; Christine Allen, "Nietzsche's Ambivalence about Women," in *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory: Women and Reproduction from Plato to Nietzsche,* ed. Lorenne M. G. Clark and Lynda Lange (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1979), pp. 117–33; Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles / Eperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche,* trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979) and "Choreographies," trans. Christie V. McDonald, *Diacritics* 12: *Cherchez La Femme: Feminist Critique / Feminine Text* (Summer 1982): 66–76; David Farrell Krell, *Postponements: Woman, Sensuality, and Death in Nietzsche* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986); R. Hinton Thomas, "Nietzsche, Women, and the Whip," *German Life and Letters* 34 (1980): 117–25; Gayle L. Ormiston, "Traces of Derrida: Nietzsche's Image of Women," *Philosophy Today* 28 (1984): 178–88; Debra B. Bergoffen, "On the Advantage and Disadvantage of Nietzsche for Women," in *The Question of the Other: Essays in Contemporary Continental Philosophy,* ed. Arleen B. Dallery and Charles E. Scott (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), pp. 77–88.

4. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 190.

5. The connection between Nietzsche's idea that a community shows its strength in terms of its capacity for generosity and the ideal of the welfare state is worth noting. I thank Johanna Meehan for first bringing this connection to my attention.

6. Marcel Mauss, *Essai sur le don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques,* in *Année sociologique,* 1923–24, pp. 30–186; *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies,* trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: Norton, 1967).

7. See Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Volume I: Consumption,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone, 1988), part 1. For an earlier discussion of his concept of "expenditure," see "The Notion of Expenditure," trans. and ed. Allan Stoekl, in Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 116–29. In this account, which at many places reminds one of Nietzsche, Bataille offers an economic account based on excess and loss to counter the utilitarian assumptions that all expenditures must be productive and compensated.

8. Although Nietzsche was quite hostile to what he understood to be the goals of socialism, the position that I am characterizing here as a noble economy is not far from the ideal expressed by Marx in *Critique of the Gotha Program* when he writes that on the banner of the higher phase of communist society will be inscribed: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!"

9. Nietzsche's prefiguration of Derridean dissemination should here be noted.

10. In the following discussion of Cixous, I will for the most part refrain from qualifying "economy" with either of the adjectives "textual," "libidinal," or "political." As I read Cixous, she sees these three economies working in terms of the same principles and what is true of one will be true of the others. If I do choose to use one of these adjectives, it will be to emphasize that particular economy in the context of what I am discussing at that moment, but should not be understood to isolate that economy from the others.

11. Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1 (1976): 888. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically as "Laugh" followed by page number. The essay to which Cixous refers appeared as "La Question du style," in *Nietzsche aujourd'hui,* 2 vols. (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1973), 1:235–87. Derrida later revised and republished this text, which in English translation is *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* (see note 3); for his discussion of the gift, see pp. 109–23.

12. Derrida, *Spurs,* p. 123.

13. I can here only note the appearance of a "sexual difference" among Derrida's "commentators" concerning whether or not they regard the thematics of the gift in Derrida's work as a topic worthy of comment. Compare, in this regard, the work of Peggy Kamuf, Christie McDonald, or Alice Jardine with that of Jonathan Culler, Rodolphe Gasché, Christopher Norris, or Gregory Ulmer.

14. Since this essay was first written, Derrida has published another work—*Donner le temps: 1. La fausse monnaie* (Paris: Galilée, 1991); *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money,* trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992)—in which he focuses his attention explicitly upon giving, exchange, and the possibility of the gift in Mauss, Heidegger, Benveniste, and Baudelaire. In the present context, it is worth noting the following from a footnote to the foreword of this work, where Derrida remarks that the problematic of the gift has been at work in his texts "wherever it is a question of the *proper* (appropriation, expropriation, exappropriation), economy, the trace, the name, and especially the *rest,* of course, which is to say more or less constantly" (p. ix).

15. That Cixous's discussion of the "*Empire du Propre*" is, in part, a rejoinder to Jacques Derrida's raising the "*question du propre*" with respect to the questions of style/woman in Nietzsche can only be suggested here. I discuss Derrida's "*question du propre*" in some detail in my *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 104–6, 117.

16. Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman,* trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 78. Subsequent references to this text will be cited parenthetically as *NBW* followed by page number.

17. Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?" trans. Annette Kuhn, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7 (1981): 50. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically as CD followed by page number.

18. Hélène Cixous, "An exchange with Hélène Cixous," trans. Verena Andermatt Conley and published as an appendix to Conley's *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1984), p. 129.

19. Hélène Cixous, "Extreme Fidelity," trans. Ann Liddle and Susan Sellers, in *Writing Differences: Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous*, ed. Susan Sellers (New York: St. Martin's, 1988), p. 15. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically as EF followed by page number.

20. In this paper, I will only be able to touch the surface of the divergent logics of giftgiving. Although I am not able to do so here, a full treatment of these divergent logics is worth pursuing. In fact, this inquiry has been ongoing within the domain of anthropology since, as Gayle Rubin has put it, Lévi-Strauss, in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon, 1969, chapter 5), added "to the theory of primitive reciprocity the idea that marriages are a most basic form of gift exchange, in which it is women who are the most precious of gifts" (Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter [New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1975], p. 173). Any serious analysis of giftgiving would, at the very least, have to consult and address the work of a wide range of recent feminist and feminist-inspired reappraisals of the effects of gender on exchange relations including, among others: Daryl K. Feil, *Ways of Exchange: The Enga 'tee' of Papua New Guinea* (St. Lucia: Univ. of Queensland Press, 1984); Renée Hirschon, ed., *Women and Property, Women as Property* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); Lisette Josephides, *The Production of Inequality: Gender and Exchange among the Kewa* (London: Tavistock, 1985); Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1988); J. van Baal, *Reciprocity and the Position of Women* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975); Annette B. Weiner, *Women of Value, Men of Renown: New Perspectives on Trobriand Exchange* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1976) and *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1992).

21. Cixous, in Conley, p. 158.

22. Cixous, in Conley, p. 137.

23. C. A. Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities* (London: Academic Press, 1982), p. 41.

24. The appeal to maternity, maternal language, and maternal images in French feminist writing is frequently an object of criticism by other, especially American, feminists; see, for example, Domna Stanton, "Difference on Trial: A Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva," in *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophy*, ed. Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 156–79.

25. Hélène Cixous, *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, ed. and trans. Verena Andermatt Conley (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. 156.

26. I am grateful to Paula Smith for first suggesting this point to me.

27. Cixous, in Conley, p. 137.

28. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972), p. 5.

29. Bourdieu, *Outline*, pp. 5–6; cf. p. 171. Bourdieu also recognizes two different economies which are distinguished along gender lines: "The opposition between the

two 'economies' is so marked that the expression *err arrtal*, also used to express the taking of revenge, means the *returning of a gift*, an exchange, in the men's speech, whereas it means 'giving back a loan' when used by the women" (p. 62). He goes on to note that "loan conduct" is more common among women than is gift exchange, which he takes to indicate that although less socially prestigious, "economic truth . . . is closer to the surface in female exchanges" (p. 63).

30. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: NLB, 1974), p. 42.

31. Nancy Fraser, "The Uses and Abuses of French Discourse Theories for Feminist Politics," *Boundary* 2 17, no. 2 (1990): 101.