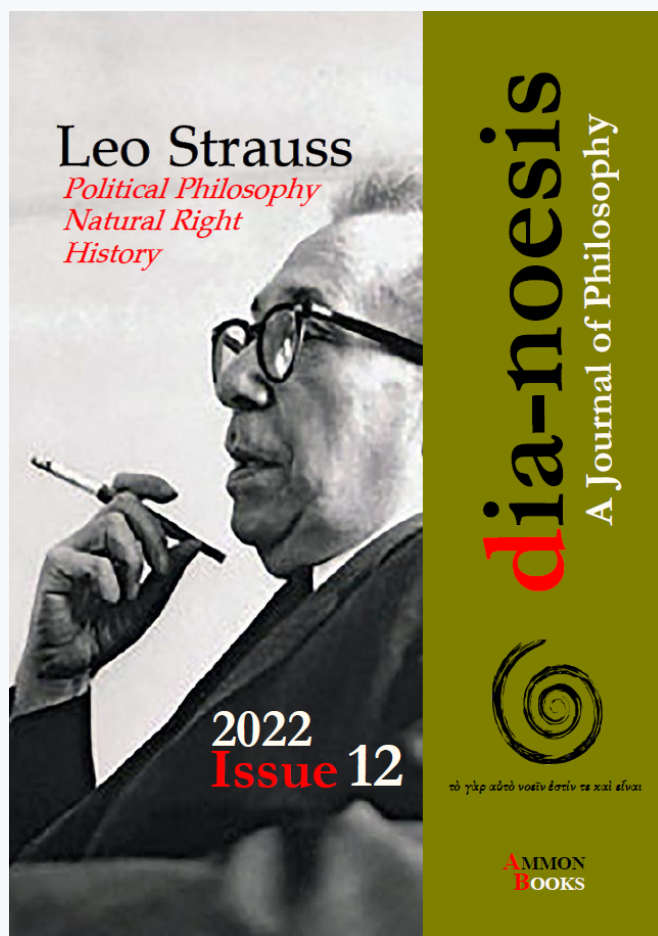


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### Leo Strauss and the Challenges of Sex

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## Leo Strauss and the Challenges of Sex

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**Abstract:** Although Leo Strauss (1899-1973) considered the binary distribution of sexuality a cornerstone of his political philosophy, a close reading of his essays reveals his awareness that traces of an androgynous conception of sexuality had survived in the foundational texts of the Hebrew and Greek tradition. The challenge posed by this contrarian view of sexual difference to Strauss' anthropological premises remained without systematic consequences for his overall philosophical project. Against this backdrop, it is hardly surprising that Strauss conspicuously overlooked the groundbreaking challenge that defrocked monk and philosophical martyr Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) posed to binary sexuality. For the first time in European intellectual history, Bruno dissolved the man/woman hiatus for the sake of positing gradual, individual differentials within the male/female polarity. As regards his contemporaries, it is noteworthy that Strauss passed away the year before a young Jewish woman named Andrea Dworkin (1946-2005) published her initial book titled *Woman Hating*, a radical advocacy of feminism culminating in a theory of universal androgyny. It is safe to assume that Strauss, if given a chance, would have discarded the challenge posed by Dworkin's Heraclitean design to lay out a sexual ontology that does away with the arbitrary fixities of patriarchy and welcomes the disruptive presence of androgynes.

**Keywords:** androgyny, bisexuality, Creation, Enlightenment, feminism/antifeminism, hermaphroditism, heterosexuality/homosexuality, historicism, individuality, Judaism, man/woman binary, memory, Nature, ontology, patriarchy, political philosophy, sex/gender, sexual difference, sexual continuum, sexuality, writing and the writer.

Μες στην μικρή την κάμαρη, που λάμπει αναμένη  
από του πολυελαίου την δυνατή φωτιά,  
διόλου συνειθισμένο φως δεν είν' αυτό που βγαίνει.  
Γι' άτολμα σώματα δεν είναι καμωμένη  
αυτής της ζέστης η ηδονή.

C. P. Cavafy: Πολυέλαιος [*Chandelier*]<sup>1</sup>

"[...] wir denken, verschweigen aber: wer denkt, löst auf, hebt auf, katastrophiert, demoliert, zersetzt, denn Denken ist folgerichtig die konsequente Auflösung aller Begriffe [...]."

Thomas Bernhard, on receiving the Georg Büchner Prize.<sup>2</sup>

1 Scholarly research has neglected examining Leo Strauss' (1899-1973) conception of sex, although the issue surfaces throughout his oeuvre and is closely related to his understanding of the theo-political predicament of the Western mind. Strauss' views on sex are especially worthy of scrutiny, as they did not ensue in the wake of the critical interest in "Geschlecht" (i.e., sex, gender, and sexuality) that emerged in fin-de-siècle and Weimar Germany. Rather, Strauss drew on his close readings of the Torah and Plato, when examining the mytho-theological notion of man's original androgyny as opposed to the intra-historical grasp of sexuality

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<sup>1</sup> C. F. Cavafy's poem Πολυέλαιος was written in 1895 and published in 1914. The cited portion has been retrieved from: *The Official Website of the Cavafy Archives*. For an English translation of the poem with the parallel Greek text, see: Cavafy, 2007, pp. 74-75. In the translation of the poem by Daniel Mendelsohn, the cited passage reads:

In the small room, which has been set  
aglow by the chandelier's powerful flames,  
the light that appears is no ordinary light.  
The pleasure of this heat has not been fashioned  
for bodies that too easily take fright

(Cavafy, 2013, p. 51).

<sup>2</sup> Bernhard, 1972, p. 216. Translation: "we think, but we conceal: whoever thinks, dissolves, annuls, brings about catastrophes, demolishes, disintegrates, for thinking is, logically, the consequent liquidation of all concepts."

based on the man/woman disjunction. Well aware that the culture of the Occident was, from its inception, haunted by the issue of sexual difference, the mature Strauss acknowledged archaic Hebrew and Greek indications of an androgynous or hermaphroditic blueprint of human sexuality. In the last resort, however, Strauss remained a paladin of the asymmetric configuration of binary sexuality, on which his political philosophy relied, when it came to validating and advancing the ideology of patriarchy. Since Strauss succumbed to the theoretical and practical convenience of reducing sexual difference to the man/woman binomial, he failed to recognize the irreducible diversity of sexuality that contradicts the subsumption of sexed individuals under finite sexual categories. Strauss' strong propensity to circumvent principled issues regarding sexual variability calls to mind the Freudian concept of *Verdrängung*, which evinces affinities to the mechanisms of *Verdecken* and *Vergessen* that Strauss himself decried in his classic study on *Hobbes' politische Wissenschaft* (Strauss, 1965, pp. 23, 25).

2. The present considerations examine the challenges posed by some salient articulations of sexuality's non-binary complexities to Strauss' prevalent assumptions concerning the disjunctive organization of sexual difference. Paradoxically, the first challenge in this regard was posed by Strauss himself, as he propounded an exegesis of *Genesis* 1:27, which, implicitly following Midrashic and Jewish-medieval teachings, contended that the First Man was an androgynous being created in the image of a two-sexed or "bi-sexual" God. The most prominent challenge to the kind of binary sexuality Strauss upheld throughout his writings, however, was articulated in the nineteenth century by Charles Darwin (1809-1882), an author Strauss occasionally referred to but without mentioning his ground-breaking universalization of human hermaphroditism or its reception and reinforcement within the German critical sexology of the early 1900s (see Bauer, 2012). While it can be argued that the new critical epistemes deriving from evolution theory did not belong to Strauss' primary area of research, hardly any reason can be adduced as to why he—a prominent

Spinoza scholar—entirely ignored the dismantlement of the sexual *bimembrum* that philosopher Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) had advanced for the first time in European intellectual history between 1582 and 1585. By a strange whim of the history of ideas, Strauss died the year before a young Jewish woman named Andrea Dworkin (1946-2005) published *Woman Hating*, a feminist treatise concluding with a theory of universal androgyny. Without ever mentioning Strauss, Dworkin effectively posited a powerful challenge to his defense of sexual binarity as a centerpiece of his political philosophy. Against this backdrop, it is worth noting that *Woman Hating* invoked in support of its conceptualization of androgyny the same Midrashic authority Strauss had in mind when analyzing *Genesis* 1:27.

3. Strauss was not primarily a biblical scholar, but a historian of the Western tradition of political thought, running from its Greek origins to Friedrich Nietzsche and beyond. Given his expertise, it is especially significant that Strauss remarked in the introduction to his study on "Plato"—included in a volume he coedited under the title *History of Political Philosophy*—that "[a]ll Platonic dialogues refer more or less directly to the political question" (Strauss, 1987a, p. 33). Despite the thematic broadness suggested in its title, Strauss' tripartite essay takes the form of a commentary on only three Platonic Dialogues: *The Republic*, *The Statesman*, and *The Laws*. In his analysis of the dialectical ductus of these major texts, Strauss highlights issues such as the specific differences structuring sexual binarity, sexuality and procreation, the equality or inequality of the sexes, and the natural distinction between man and woman (Strauss, 1987a, pp. 39, 51, 55, 63, 71). Notwithstanding their scholarly depth, however, Strauss' elaborations make the questionable assumption that the political relevancy of the Platonic conception of sexuality resides, first and foremost, in sanctioning the binary regime of sexual distribution as the nature-grounded cornerstone that subtends all prevalent forms of civilizational organization. Not by chance, Strauss' "Plato" omits to assess the critical perspective on the prevalent sexual doxa, which the Platonic

discussions on the *third sex* and its relation to erotic love suggest. Although Strauss deals with these issues in his posthumously edited commentary titled *On Plato's Symposium* (2001), this contribution remains, to all intent and purposes, within the ambit of his patriarchal understanding of Plato's core sexual premises.

4. In *On Plato's Symposium*, Strauss admits that "the difference between the sexes is a great theme throughout Plato and particularly in the *Symposium*" (Strauss, 2001, p. 72). This overarching ascertainment, however, is only modestly underpinned by the way Strauss' deals with the issue. In "Plato," for instance, Strauss elucidates the philosopher's binomial sexual premises, but does not discuss their actual scope in light of the contrarian views on sexual difference advanced, in the main, by Aristophanes in the *Symposium*. To use a characteristic term of Strauss's own hermeneutical vocabulary, his core "tendency" (Colen & Minkov, 2018, pp. 108, 226, 237, 241) was to avoid philosophical discussions on the sexual complexities, which his philological and historical writings had disclosed. His disinclination to problematize, philosophically, the notion of sexuality is reflected in his programmatic lectures and essays published under the title *Toward Natural Right and History*, which anticipate the outline of Strauss' Walgreen Lectures and the ensuing volume *Natural Right and History* of 1953. Signally, the precursory lectures mention once (and only once) the word *sex* (Colen & Minkov, 2018, p. 234; see Strauss, 1953, pp. 216, 217), without offering any semantic or contextual clarifications of the intricate, many-layered concept. Strauss deploys the word when discussing Hobbes's *Leviathan* as an institution designed to secure the natural right of men. In this framework, Strauss adduces a sequence of anthropological determinants that have no incidence on the maintenance of "man's natural, unalienable right." The order of decreasing relevancy in which Strauss enumerates these factors is revealing: "sex, color, creed, age, merit or sin" (Colen & Minkov, 2018, p. 234). Notwithstanding the prominence accorded to *sex* in the series, Strauss did not deem necessary to elaborate on the premised sex-less or

gender-free abstraction that constitutes the actual subject of natural right. Strauss' decision to obviate further precisions may well have been encouraged by the (for him surely agreeable) conflation in English of the generic concept of *man* with the gender-marked notion of *man* as the distinctly masculine, non-female human being.

5. Although the English term "human being" comes close to the gender-unmarked German word *Mensch* or the Yiddish *mentsch*, Strauss showed little interest in its deployment to avoid the polysemic valence of *man* and its larval axiological depotentialization of *woman*, a concept suggesting a deviation from the presumed universality of the male man. Strauss' disregard for this kind of onto-semantic subtleties is reflected in his injudicious embracement of sexual binarity, the ideological blueprint that underlies the theoretical endeavors of his German contemporaries Arnold Gehlen (1904-1976) and Helmuth Plessner (1892-1985), the founders of modern philosophical anthropology. For Strauss, it was perhaps of more import that the disjunctive sexual scheme remained unquestioned in the work of the two German-Jewish thinkers that inaugurated the neo-Kantian lineage from which Strauss was to emerge: Hermann Cohen (1842-1918) and Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945). Occasionally, however, Strauss took his distance from the immemorial dichotomization of the sexes in some scattered remarks on the first account of Adam's creation in the *Book of Genesis*. Indeed, in his 1957 essay "On the Interpretation of Genesis," Strauss quotes a passage, which he considers "a very difficult sentence" and effectively corresponds to *Genesis* 1:27. Although Strauss mistakenly refers in this context to *Genesis* 1:26, there is no question about which verse he actually had in mind, since he quotes it in full: "And God created man in His image, in His image, in the image of God, did God create him, male and female did He create them" (Strauss, 1997a, p. 366). Aside from the fact that this citation erroneously repeats the phrase "in His image," Strauss proceeded with extreme care in conveying his understanding of one of the most controversial and consequential passages in the Hebrew Bible.

6. Strauss leaves no doubt about his take on *Genesis* 1:27:

The dualism of the male and female could well be used for the fundamental articulation of the world, as it was used in this way in many cosmogonies—the male and female gender of nouns seems to correspond to the male and female gender of all things, and this could lead to the assumption of two principles, a male and a female, a highest god and a highest goddess. The Bible disposes of this possibility by ascribing the dualism of male and female, as it were, to God Himself by locating, as it were, the root of their dualism within God. God created man in His image and, therefore, He created him male and female (Strauss, 1997a, p. 366).

The anchorage of the human male/female dualism in the image of God and thus within God himself is by no means a slip of the tongue (or of the pen), since Strauss expressly remarks that the distinction of male and female is mentioned in the Bible "only in the case of man, hence saying, as it were, that male and female are not universal characters" (Strauss, 1997a, p. 367). The human individual's prerogative of being, at the same time, male and female in correspondence to the image of his Creator links Jewish monotheism with a creational anthropology that dissolves on principle the heathen hiatus between the human sexes. In what seems to be an attempt to make this fundamental Jewish tenet more accessible to a broader readership, Strauss resumes it in a single argumentative move when he ascribes *bisexuality*—a mostly suspicious notion among cultural philistines—to human beings and to the Holy One Himself in a passage of his 1967 essay "Jerusalem and Athens. Some Preliminary Reflections."

7. In his argumentation, Strauss first cites the *locus classicus* of biblical anthropology: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..... So God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Based on this passage from the *Book of Genesis*, Strauss seeks to refute the pervasive understanding of the dichotomic nature of human sexuality. Thus, assuming a correspondence between



the Creator's image and the specifically human, non-disjunctive sexuality, Strauss concludes: "Bisexuality is not a preserve of man" (Strauss, 1997b, p. 383). Although Strauss' elaborations make no explicit reference to Jewish sources underpinning his theo-anthropological contention, any reader familiar with the Oral Torah will immediately recognize the canonical presence of Rabbi Yirmiyah ben Elazar behind Strauss' deployment of the post/Freudian sounding term *bisexuality* in this context. Indeed, in the collection of ancient homiletical-rabbinical interpretations of the *Book of Genesis* called *Genesis Rabbah* (ca. 300-500 C.E.), it is reported:

אָמַר רַבִּי יִרְמְיָהּ בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר בְּשַׁעַת שִׁבְרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ  
הוּא אֶת אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן, אֲנָדְרוֹגִינוֹס בְּרָאוּ, הֵדָא הוּא דְכְתִיב:  
(*Genesis Rabbah*, 8, 1) זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בְּרָאָם.

Rabbi Yirmiyah ben Elazar declared: In the hour when the Holy One, blessed be He, created the first human, He created him as an androgynous, as it is said, 'male and female He created them.'

Signally, the Midrashic passage mentions the Hebrew transliteration (אֲנָדְרוֹגִינוֹס) of the Greek word for androgynous: ἀνδρόγυνος. In accordance with this non-mainstream, but authoritative Jewish understanding of creational Adam as an androgyne, Kabbalistic interpretations of *Genesis* 1:27 have underscored the double-sex nature of the divine "image" (צֶלֶם), which served as model for the Creation of the First Human Being (see Ginsburg, 1920, pp. 91-92; 114-118; Idel, 2005, pp. 59-63; Sameth, 2020a).

8. Strauss' attribution of "bisexuality" to the Adamic human and his/her Creator may sound as an untenable provocation only to those unfamiliar with the Jewish intellectual heritage. Without explicitly acknowledging it, Strauss combined the unsettling Midrashic conception of the first human being as androgynous and the Kabbalistic notion of the "androgynous protoplast" (Ginsburg, 1920, p. 168), the "bi-sexual" image of

the Holy One. Although Strauss was certainly aware that his elaborations would meet spontaneous rejection in many quarters, he dispensed with naming the Jewish sources supporting his take. It is worth noting, however, that, decades earlier, a similar approach of creational androgyny had been deployed by German-Jewish sex researcher and scholar Magnus Hirschfeld (1968-1935) (see Bauer, 2015a; Bauer, 2018).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in 1926, Hirschfeld published the initial

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<sup>3</sup> The assumption concerning the double-sexed nature of the two original Edenic personae has seldom been properly articulated within recent biblical scholarship. As regards the human participant in the encounter, renowned Hebrew biblical scholar Phyllis Trible underscored in her 1973 essay "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread," that "[u]ntil the differentiation of female and male (2:21-23), 'adham is basically androgynous: one creature incorporating two sexes" (Trible, 1979, p. 74). In an endnote appended to her assertion that "the first act in Genesis 2 is the creation of androgyny (2:7), and the last is the creation of sexuality (2:23)" (Trible, 1979, p. 76), Trible details:

In proposing as primary an androgynous interpretation of 'adham, I find virtually no support from (male) biblical scholars. But my view stands as documented from the text, and I take refuge among a remnant of ancient (male) rabbis (see George Foot Moore, *Judaism* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927], I, 453; also Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Meridian Books, The World Publishing Company, 1970), pp. 152ff., 279f. (Trible, 1979, 82).

The "ancient (male) rabbis" to which Trible refers, are explicitly named in Moore's *Judaism*: Rabbi Samuel bar Nahman and Rabbi Jeremiah ben Eleazer (Moore, 1958, I, p. 453). As regards the divine persona, Joseph Campbell, after elaborating on the Midrashic notion of Adam's androgyny, pointed to the very "image of God" as being androgynous. In a passage that begins with the locus classicus of Man's creation, Campbell details:

'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.' The question may arise in the mind as to the nature of the image of God; but the answer is already given in the text, and it is clear enough. 'When the Holy One, Blessed be He, created the first man, He created him androgynous' (Campbell, 2008, p. 131).

Campbell further adduces in support of Man's creational androgyny a text from the thirteenth century *Book of Zohar*, the foundational text of Kabbalah, which in some Jewish quarters is considered the concealed part of the Oral Torah and therewith of divine or revealed origin (see Campbell, 2008, pp. 240, 359; Ginsburg, 1920, p. 116). Phyllis Trible's unequivocal position regarding Adam's androgyny and her reference to an authoritative

volume of his magnum opus *Geschlechtskunde auf Grund dreißigjähriger Forschung und Erfahrung bearbeitet* (literally: Sexology on the base of thirty years of research and experience), which includes a passage that anticipates Strauss's exegesis of *Genesis* 1:27. Not unlike Strauss, Hirschfeld omits any reference to the Mishnaic and Kabbalistic interpretations of the passage that underpin his assertion that Adam as well as the Holy One Himself are to be conceived of as ambisexual:

Es ist ja auch klar, daß wenn Gott den Menschen, also Mann und Weib, nach seinem Ebenbild schuf, er selbst auch zugleich männlich und weiblich aufgefaßt werden muß (Hirschfeld, 1926, p. 485).

It is clear that, if God created the human being, that is man and woman, according to His image, He Himself has to be conceived of as being at the same time male and female.<sup>4</sup>

9. Despite relying on the same passage in the *Book of Genesis* and notwithstanding their shared awareness of its Jewish *Wirkungsgeschichte*, Hirschfeld and Strauss accorded a very different systemic scope to the idea of androgyny within their respective overall pursuits. For Hirschfeld, *Genesis* 1:27 constituted a foremost para-epistemic forecast of his own Darwinian-based universalization of human sexual intermediariness as the core of his sexology (see Bauer, 2004, April; Bauer, 2005; Bauer, 2009; Bauer, 2012).<sup>5</sup> Strauss, like Hirschfeld, clearly acknowledged the cesura marked by the non-dichotomic conceptualization of sexuality in the first

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rabbinical tradition covering the period between the Mishna and Kabbalah is of especial significance in view of the nascent Jewish transgender movement, which has been characterized as marking the "'new frontier'" (Zeveloff, 2014, p. vi) of Judaism.

<sup>4</sup> On the history of the Holy One's dual-gendered name, see: Sameth, 2020a.

<sup>5</sup> Hirschfeld's take on *Genesis* 1:27 is especially relevant in view of the fact that the Talmud makes reference to forms of sexes/genders that suggest the inherent inadequacy of categorizing all sexed individuals according to the male/female disjunction. See in this connection: אנדרוגיניזם ('Androgynos) / Hermaphrodite, (5734 / 1974); Dzmura 2010a; Dzmura, 2010b; Fonrobert, 2007; Ladin, 2019; Sameth 2020b.

chapter of *Genesis*. But this recognition remained without consequences when it came to determining the anthropological premises on which his political philosophy was grounded. This is not altogether surprising, if one considers that there are no indications that Strauss considered the Adamic אָנְדְּרוֹגִינֹס to be a "prepolitical savage" (Strauss, 1953, p. 254) or a representative of "man's *original* condition" as understood by Enlightenment philosophers (Strauss, 1953, p. 95; emphasis added). Strauss obliteration of the androgyne from his own philosophical pursuits, made all the more patent his long-standing commitment to the idea of an ethical commonality shared by Greek wisdom and the Hebrew Bible. Thus, despite acknowledging the "fundamental tension" between the "two codes" (Strauss, 1997c, p. 116) of the Western world embodied in Plato's *Laws* and the Mosaic Torah (see Strauss, 1997c, p. 105), Strauss underscored their essential agreement concerning what he termed "morality." Stunningly oblivious to the creational Androgyne, Strauss persisted in propounding a sexual anthropology derived from the pervasive asymmetric version of dichotomous sexuality and its societal concretizations:

Greek philosophy and the Bible agree as to this, that the proper framework of morality is the patriarchal family, which is or tends to be, monogamous, and which forms the cell of a society in which the free adult males, and especially the old ones predominate. Whatever the Bible and philosophy may tell us about the nobility of certain women, in principle both insist upon the superiority of the male sex (Strauss, 1997c, p. 105).

10. Accordant with his nostalgia of recomforting origins, Strauss stressed that the "proper frame of morality" demands not only the binomial distribution of the sexes but also their hierarchical, non-egalitarian, patriarchal organization. Since Strauss assumes that the notion of "divine law" constitutes "the common ground between the Bible and Greek philosophy" (Strauss, 1997c, p. 107) and that this common ground sanctions sexual binarity and the subordination of women to men, it does not come as a surprise that he opted for overlooking or

discarding core elements within both "codes" that question or contest their foundational premises. Since postulating the ineradicable androgyny of Adam and his/her Creator effectively undermines the maintenance of the patriarchal moral order as civilizations have understood it for millennia, Strauss desisted from upholding an unsettling view whose principled validity he had once admitted, although it factually disrupted the basic axioms of his own constructive design. In the last resort, Strauss did not need to be reminded that a political regime sanctioned by either of the civilizational codes could not survive the critical dissolution of the sexual hiatus resulting from the thoroughgoing implementation of a non-disjunctive scheme of sexuality. Consequently, Strauss not only refuted modern and contemporary attempts to critique in depth the "codes" of Western Law and their sexual assumptions but advocated a "return" to Hebraic and Greco-Roman Antiquity as a philosophical strategy that would redeem present-day culture from the relativistic trends of modernist historicism. Given the restorative tendency animating his most significant intervention as a philosopher of history, Strauss has been considered in some academic quarters as being "[a]mong the great philosophers of the twentieth century" (Meier, 2014, p. 13). This kind of praise, however, loses sight of Strauss' unwarranted preparedness to dispense with core anthropological insights which, despite their acknowledged truth, were only marginally integrated into the twin codes of the Occident's Law.

11. Strauss' programmatic reorientation toward Antiquity was deployed between 1929 and 1937. In this period, he scrutinized the tensional "poles" structuring the law-centeredness of Western intellectual and societal life since its Platonic and Mosaic beginnings. Against this backdrop, Strauss not only diagnosed the crisis of Modernity as a failed connectedness to objective truth but sought to recover the natural anchorage of society's ancient morals, which, in his view, revolved around the patriarchal family as a regime implying the subordination of women to men and the exclusion of same-sex or non-binary sexual configurations.

Since Strauss pleaded for the reactivation of the Hebraic and Greek ethical "codes" in the present, he effectively contributed to the further de-potentialization of theo-anthropological contents, which had been thematized and transmitted as merely vestigial elements that contradicted and subverted the normative heritages in which they were embedded. Paradigmatic is the case of the proto-Hebraic conception of creational androgyny, which resisted the universal validity assigned to the disjunctive scheme of man/woman distribution in the Hebrew Bible. Strauss' refusal to discuss the present-day relevancy of the deranging assumptions he uncovers regarding the androgyny of the Creator and His human creation in *Genesis* 1:27, resonates with his reluctance to reflect on the contemporary import of the views on androgyny, homoeroticism and same-sex sexuality advanced in the Platonic *Symposium*. Disappointingly, Strauss offers no answer to the question as to why he dispenses with assessing the philosophical and anthropological significance not only of *Genesis* 1:27, but also of the unsettling views articulated by Aristophanes, "the greatest individual in [the *Symposium*], apart from Socrates himself" (Strauss, 2001, p. 151). Besides echoing age-old teachings concerning humanity's original sex tripartition, Aristophanes postulated "the superiority of pederasty" (Strauss, 2001, p. 143) and upheld the (for most contemporary ears) surely outrageous view that "the best males, the homosexual males, turn to politics when they become old" (Strauss, 2001, p. 136).

12. In the foreword to Strauss' edited commentary on the *Symposium*, Seth Benardete remarked that it "is [...] the furthest that Professor Strauss ever strayed in his courses on Plato from the strictly political dialogues" (Benardete, 2001, p. vii). As Strauss underscored, however, his *Symposium* commentary did not stray from the thematic focus of his previous publications on the *Dialogues*: "This course will be on Plato's political philosophy" (Strauss, 2001, p. 1). While the edited text offers "an explanation and an interpretation of the *Symposium*" (Strauss, 2001, p. 1), it occasionally includes some of Strauss' idiosyncratic views on sexual difference that can

also be found scattered throughout his books and essays. Thus, Strauss' contention regarding the intellectual superiority of the male sex expressed, for instance, in his 1948 essay on Spinoza (Strauss, 1997c, p. 105) is echoed in the *Symposium* commentary, when he asserts that

"when one disregards all the bewildering facts and looks at the history of philosophy on the one hand and at political history on the other, we see that the top men in the history of philosophy were all males. Among the top people in history were quite a few women. Somehow they are more earthy. This is not simply a Greek prejudice" (Strauss, 2001, p. 72).

Although Strauss sought to find formulaic accommodations and factual counterexamples meant to make more palatable his ontic denigration of womanhood, it is apparent that his views on sexual difference were premised on the full disjunction between male plenitude and female lack, a stance that echoes the Pythagorean Table of Opposites transmitted by Aristotle (see Aristotle, (1968), pp. 34-35 [*Metaphysics* 986a23-26]). Accordantly, in Strauss' personal weltanschauung there is no this-worldly alternative to the scheme of male/female distribution. His elaborations on God's and Adam's "bisexuality" and his analysis of androgyny and sexual difference in the *Symposium* were basically exegetical, philological and historical exercises that left unchallenged his own premise that, as regards the sexual difference of human individuals in the real world, *tertium non datur*. Consequently, any close examination of Strauss' stance on sexual difference makes abundantly clear that he missed Charles Darwin's bodily-anchored conception of universalized human hermaphroditism: "Every man & woman is hermaphrodite [...]" (Darwin, 1987, p. 384 [*Notebook D* (1838), No. 162]).<sup>6</sup> Openly betraying his nescience of Darwinian evolution, Strauss flippantly denied the existence of human androgyny.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Shortly prior to this remark, Darwin noted: "Every animal surely is hermaphrodite" (Darwin, 1987, p. 380 [*Notebook D* (1838), no. 154]).

<sup>7</sup> Darwin refers to his conception of universal hermaphroditism not only in the *Notebooks*. In a letter written to Scottish geologist Charles Lyell (1797-1845) on January 10, 1860, Darwin noted: "Our ancestor was an

13. Against the backdrop of his discussion of *Symposium* 190c6-d6, Strauss answered a non-recorded question from his audience in the following terms:

*Androgynous* we use as a term for a womanish man or a mannish woman. But to say there were such people literally is a fantastic thing. We must not forget that the dramatic poet is concerned with stage effects and that is much more striking. Later on, after they are split, there are only males and females (Strauss, 2001, p. 127).

As a poor reader of Darwin, Strauss begins by trivializing the phenomenon of androgyny as a matter of gender variance, as evinced by people who display behaviors contradicting the sex of their birth. To go any further, i.e., to assume the existence of people whose biological sex cannot be subsumed under the disjunctive categories of male and female, would be, in Strauss' view, tantamount with positing "a fantastic thing."<sup>8</sup> Since the stage effect of presenting an androgyne is "much more

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animal which [...] undoubtedly was an hermaphrodite! Here is a pleasant genealogy for mankind.—" (Darwin, 1993, p. 28 / Letter 2647; emphasis in original). An editorial footnote appended to the letter indicates that Lyell made annotations related to the letter on the cover. Among other things, Lyell remarked: "Man originally an hermaphrodite" (Darwin, 1993, p. 29 / Letter 2647). Drawing on these insights, Darwin eventually concluded in *The Descent of Man* (1871) that, in their being, human individuals replicate their lineage from "some extremely remote progenitor of the whole vertebrate kingdom [that] appears to have been hermaphrodite or androgynous" (Darwin, 1981, Part I, p. 207).

<sup>8</sup> While Strauss spurns discussions on androgyny as a "fantastic thing" contradicting the nature-anchored sexual disjunction, he focuses at length on homosexuality as an issue of gender variance when commenting on Xenophon's *Hiero or Tyrannicus* and the role played by bodily pleasures in the dialogue (*Hiero*, 1, 10-38; see Strauss, 1963, pp. 2-6). According to Strauss, the tyrant "Hiero is concerned most of all with the tyrant's lack of the sweetest pleasure of homosexual love" (Strauss, 1963, p. 51; see pp. 46, 61). The reference here is not to homosexuality in general, but to "the pleasures of Aphrodite with boys" (Strauss, 1963, p. 5), that is, a specific male/male configuration deployed within the accepted pattern of disjunctive sexuality. Since, as already suggested, androgyny calls to question the man/woman distribution and its same-sex combinatories, it does not constitute an issue Strauss would be prepared to address in a this-worldly setting. His own elaborations concerning androgyny or hermaphroditism in a proto-creational or ur-historical context are not relevant to his treatment of the realistic sexual premises on which *On Tyranny* relies.



striking" than any fantasies concerning non-existent androgynes, Strauss suffices himself with suggesting that once the theatrical performance is over, everything comes back to sexual normalcy, and the male/female hiatus can once again reign supreme. Although the theoretical strategy of banning androgyny from reality has proved to be a conspicuous failure in post-Darwinian times, Strauss considered his move a viable path toward the reinstatement of the increasingly embattled conception of sexual binarity. Accordingly, Strauss opted for passing over in silence his own exegesis of *Genesis* 1:27 and the ensuing theological sanction of androgyny. One can only wonder how he would seek to justify the obvious contradiction between his disparaging comments on the merely imagined androgynes and his Torah-based contentions regarding the androgyny that the First Human Being shared with his Creator.

14. It seems safe to assume that Strauss had some degree of awareness of his inconsistent stance on androgyny. The ancient textual evidence he dealt with pressed him into tacitly admitting that both the Aristophanian "extinct sex of man [...], now, the most in disrepute" (Strauss, 2001, p. 123)<sup>9</sup> as well as

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<sup>9</sup> As regards Aristophanes, Strauss points out that his exposition in *Symposium* 189d5-e5 begins with the *triton genos* as the "extinct sex of man" because "it is the most striking [and] also, now, the most in disrepute" (Strauss, 2001, p. 123). Strauss mentions that while the third sex was, according to Aristophanes, "originally [...] the thing itself and a respectable name," it has become "today [...] merely a shadow, a name" (Strauss, 2001, p. 123). The contrast between *then* and *now* hinges on the fact that the third sex is no more a viable alternative within the present-day scheme of sexual distribution. As Strauss still following Aristophanes suggests, the exclusion of the androgyne from the ambit of human sexual configurations marks the emergence of the homosexual as a deviant usurper of the ontic validity attributable only to *man* and *woman* in non-mythological, historical times. While analyzing the consequences of the disappearance of androgyny, Strauss shows no interest in de-mythologizing the actual meaning and cause of androgyny's absence from history. That Strauss avoids this kind of questioning is understandable since he seems to be in perfect agreement with Aristophanes' "realistic" resolution of the issue of sexual difference, which ratifies sexual binarity as an indispensable condition for attaining the historical telos of human realization and keeps derivative homosexuality at bay as a disreputable "shadow" (Strauss, 2001,

the androgyny of Adam *in illo tempore* were tenets he could not possibly integrate into the sexual theo-politics he advocated throughout his writerly career. Instead of examining closely the anthropological reality underlying Aristophanes' postulation in the *Symposium* of originally "three genera of human beings" (see *Symposium* 189d6-e5) and the first account of Man's creation in *Genesis*, Strauss sufficed himself with denying outright the existence of androgynes in Greek ur-history and banning the Adamic Androgyne from the purview of his philosophical concerns. On Strauss' assumptions, androgyny/hermaphroditism becomes either a risible gender option or a supernal sexual configuration without any assignable political function in historical times. Despite willfully ignoring the relevancy of the traces of androgyny in the Greek and Hebraic traditions to present-day cultural life, the issue of a non-disjunctive sexual scheme appears to have haunted him in distorted form as the guilty conscience of his heteronormative theo-politics. It is significant in this regard

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p. 123) of no more existent androgyny. Strauss' acceptance of the antique disposal of the third sex alternative, however, seems to have prejudiced him against acknowledging its modern resurgence. Accordingly, Strauss ignores the nineteenth-century conception of the third sex advanced by German jurist and sexological pioneer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895). Aiming at redefining sexuality within a triadic scheme of sexual modes, Ulrichs defined the male Uranian as "[a]nima muliebris virili corpore inclusa" (Ulrichs, 1994a, p. i), i.e., a female psyche confined in a male body. Moreover, Ulrichs advanced the idea that Uranians as well as their female counterparts appertain to a separate, hermaphroditic-like class clearly distinguishable from normal men and women: "Wir Urninge bilden eine zwitterähnliche besondere geschlechtliche Menschenklasse, ein eigenes Geschlecht, dem der Männer und dem der Weiber als drittes Geschlecht coordiniert" (Ulrichs, 1994b, p. 5). Having ignored Ulrichs' conception of *drittes Geschlecht* as a specific alternative to the binary sexes that closures what is representable as sexuality, Strauss was not able to grasp the scope and relevancy of the critique of Ulrichs' contentions laid out by his younger contemporary Magnus Hirschfeld. Indeed, rejecting the modern triadic scheme of sexual distribution, Hirschfeld's Darwinian inspired *sexuelle Zwischenstufenlehre* premised a potentially infinite number of sexualities co-extensive with the number of existing sexed individuals. Since he failed to examine the reason for the absence (or non-visibility) of the Androgyne from Aristophanes' present, Strauss appears to have been at a loss when confronting the revindications of modern sexuality regarding sexual difference. For an outline of the history of the *third sex*, see: Bauer, 2015b.

that, as his collection of essays published under the general title *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952) suggests, Strauss was intimately cognizant of the dialectics of silencing and repressing as a determinant factor in the shaping of world history and autobiography. It is certainly not by chance that the initial paragraph of his essay "What is Political Philosophy?" includes a sentence that has the aura of the confessional: "But while being compelled or compelling myself, to wander far away from our sacred heritage, or *to be silent about it*, I shall not for a moment forget what Jerusalem stands for" (Strauss, 1988, p. 10; emphasis added). While Strauss appears to refer in this passage to the normative "code" of Judaism, his words are also applicable to the unassimilable "anti-code" transmitted as part of the Torah, whose historical erasure has proven to be more consequential than the silencing Strauss publicly avows.

15. As a Jew, Strauss was a man of memory, troubled by the perils of losing sight of the already known or deliberately repressing it. Accordantly, the issue of forgetting one's Jewish heritage is deepened and universalized in the very last lines of "What Is Political Philosophy?" when Strauss touches on the modern predicament of letting the quintessentially human disappear from human memory. Consonant with his advocacy for a return to the ethical sources of Greco-Roman and Hebrew Antiquity, Strauss closes his study with the following sentence:

For oblivion of eternity, or, in other words, estrangement from man's deepest desire and therewith from primary issues, is the price which modern man had to pay, from the very beginning, for attempting to be absolutely sovereign, to become the master and owner of nature, to conquer chance (Strauss, 1988, p. 55).

While deploying the Feuerbachian notion of "estrangement" (*Entfremdung*) to depict the Machiavellian and Hobbesian repression of "man's deepest desire," Strauss appears to overlook that the mechanism at stake is not exclusively "modern," since it played a decisive role at the time when the Platonic and Mosaic *Law* became the foundation of the

Occident's political philosophy. The obliterative forgetfulness concerning the human being's "eternal" essence and desire marked the emergence of Western patriarchal history, but it also informs Strauss' démarche when he ignores the significance of the gap between the theo-mythological view of human androgyny and the Western *Law's* sanction of the disjunctive sexes. In principle, Strauss reminisces and acknowledges the status ante of the sexual hiatus in his episodic references to the Adamic Androgyne. But this unfledged remembrance was soon abandoned to the forces of oblivion for being incompatible with the organizational constraints of what Strauss considered civilized life. In the last resort, what contradicts sexual binarity as the gist of societal togetherness is eventually banned by Strauss to the ambit of a supra-historical or decadent ideality. Once this purge is completed, only the patriarchal model of political culture remains, whose constrictive blessings Strauss never tires to acclaim.

16. Unlike post-1960s authors who turned to Western myths of origin for orientation when discussing the principles of their revolutionary sexual politics, Strauss assumed that neither the biblical conception of the androgynous Adam nor its Greek mythological counterpart had a role to play in determining the finality of modern projects of radical sexual change (see Bauer, 2020a). Considering the theo-mythological models of sexual androgyny as incompatible with factual reality, Strauss overlooked that their detachment from the purportedly given was the *sine qua non* for debunking alienatory sexual patterns closed on themselves for the sake of ensuring their self-replicative stability. Given that androgyny's critical disruptiveness undoes the identitarian conception of disjunctive sexualities on which the civilizational order of patriarchy relies, Strauss was especially keen on denying the need for a principled review of the sexual status quo which the two "codes" of Western morality had sanctioned since the beginning of historical time. Since Strauss' intellectual project did not rise beyond the immanent analysis of pre-ordained revelational or philosophical systems, he discarded the

challenges posed by Jewish-Messianic patterns of thought designed to open up the alienatory closures of reality to its own—until then—unconceivable futurity. For Strauss, the Mosaic liberation constitutes in essence a divine deed of the past that remains alien to contemporary concerns about human self-emancipation. In the prevalently un-Messianic understanding of history that Strauss advances, the androgynous Holy One could not be conceived of as commanding men and women to liberate themselves from the idolatrous constraints of the male/female disjunction. Unable to relate creational androgyny to the core task of human self-liberation, Strauss unsurprisingly neglected—as already indicated—the sexual critique advanced by Giordano Bruno, a metaphysical thinker with unmistakable affinities to Modernity's greatest Jewish philosopher.

17. It is generally acknowledged that Strauss stands out as one of the leading experts in the theo-political philosophy of Baruch de Spinoza (1632-1677). Among Strauss' most significant writings are his early book-length publication titled *Die Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwissenschaft. Untersuchungen zu Spinoza's Theologisch-politischen Traktat* (1930) and the essay "How to Study Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise" (1948). In later years, Strauss also penned in English an important "Preface to Spinoza's Critique of Religion" (1965). As these titles convey, Strauss was not primarily concerned with Spinoza's *Ethica* as the foremost expression of his ontological thought, but with his critique of the textual sources of Judaism and Christianity as revealed religions. Strauss' reaction against the premises of Spinozian Enlightenment he had initially embraced, eventually prompted a new direction in his own political thought (see Almaleh, Baraquin, & Depadt-Ejchenbaum, 1991, pp. 9-12). As Heinrich Meier has pointed out, after the completion of *Religionskritik* in 1928, Strauss "reached a caesura that was of the greatest importance for his further path of thought" (Meier, 2014, p. 16). As a consequence of his "change of orientation," which was first expressed in his "Anmerkungen zu Carl Schmitt, 'Der Begriff des Politischen'" (1932), Strauss

disclaimed his earlier contention "that a return to premodern philosophy is impossible" (Strauss, 1997d, p. 173). While distancing himself from Spinoza's rejection of biblical revelation, Strauss drew on his close readings of the philosopher when laying out the principles of his historical hermeneutics, which are summed up in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Strauss' 1952 pathbreaking collection of five previously published essays. Arguably the most notable among them is the already mentioned 1948 study on Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*.

18. As regards Spinoza's own "art of writing," Strauss points out in his "Preface to *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*" of 1965:

In the [*Theologico-Political*] *Treatise* Spinoza addresses potential philosophers of a certain kind while the vulgar are listening. He speaks therefore in such a way that the vulgar will not understand what he means. It is for this reason that he expresses himself contradictorily: those shocked by his heterodox statements will be appeased by more or less orthodox formulae (Strauss, 1997d, p. 212).

Strauss' 1939 "Lecture Notes for 'Persecution and the Art of Writing,'" which preceded by two years the actual essay that lent its title to the 1952 book, drew on the hermeneutical issues discussed in *Die Religionskritik Spinozas* (1930). Despite their sketchiness and brevity, the "Lecture Notes" focus on the interpretive principles Strauss deploys when examining the texts that had once destabilized the "frame of reference" (Strauss, 1953, p. 26) of European Modernity. Assuming in general that "[i]f people hide their opinions, they will not *say* that they hide them, or at least they will not say it too loud—or else they would defeat their own purpose" (Strauss, 2014, p. 297; emphasis in original), Strauss adduces textual evidence from the writings of Lessing, Montesquieu, Spinoza, Descartes and Bacon that justifies implementing the traditional distinction between *exoteric* and *esoteric* teachings as an analytical tool of interpretation. In this connection, Strauss is careful to underscore that "[a]n esoteric teaching is *not*, as some present-day scholars seem to think, a *mystical* teaching: it is

the *scientific* teaching. Exoteric = popular. Esoteric = scientific and *therefore* secret" (Strauss, 2014, p. 300; emphasis in original). In closing the "Lecture Notes," Strauss makes a signal avowal concerning the need to protect philosophical truth by its opposite: "Hiding one's thoughts about the crucial things, when speaking or writing about those things, means making *misstatements* about those things—or: to *lie* about those things" (Strauss, 2014, p. 304; emphasis in original).

19. Although the texts supporting Strauss' hermeneutical premises belong to the ambit of science and philosophy, it is worth noting that his "Notes" begin by referring to Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547-1616), the author of the two-part novel *Don Quixote de la Mancha* published in 1605 and 1615. Strauss highlights not only that Cervantes's interrupted the novel at one point because, "as he says, he does not know the continuation," but also that the resumption of the narrative was enabled by the alleged discovery of an ancient Arabic manuscript that the author got translated into Castilian. Against this backdrop, Strauss remarks that "the larger part of that immortal work [...] claims to be written, not by Cervantes, but by Sid Hamed, a Muslim" (Strauss, 2014, p. 293). While considering this claim as obviously false, Strauss takes it as an occasion for remitting to a comparable authorial dialectics ascertainable in Spinoza's writings. Signally, recent close readings of Cervantes' work tend to confirm the old suspicion that he was—not unlike Spinoza himself—of Marrano descent (Yovel, 1992, p. 129). In the "Lecture Notes" of 1939, Strauss does not mention Cervantes' genealogy. But he may well have had an inkling of Cervantes' mostly silenced commonality with Spinoza, the "Marrano of reason," who hailed from a Jewish-Portuguese family of converts to Christianity. Since such converts were often despised by Jews and mistrusted by their new correligionists (Yovel, 1992, pp. 15-39), it is not surprising that they developed in time strategies of intellectual disguise, which became the source of what Strauss depicts as the Spinozean "art of writing" seeking to hide the truth from inept or inattentive readers. Nothing of the like can be said of Giordano Bruno, Cervantes' younger contemporary, whose

critical dissolution of the sexual *bimembrum* was based on a non-Christian ontology that announced Spinoza's pan(en)theism. Despite this groundbreaking critical achievement, the defrocked Dominican monk and philosophical martyr did not attract Strauss' philosophical attention. The absence of Bruno from Strauss' oeuvre is disconcerting, especially if one considers that the Nolanus' defiance of the man/woman distributive scheme evinces obvious functional affinities to the challenge posed by *Genesis* 1:27 and its radical Mishnaic-Kabbalistic exegesis to binomial sexuality.

20. When assessing Strauss's disinterest in Bruno's ontological thought in general, and in his critique of the dichotomous regime of sexual distribution in particular, it should be taken into account that, after Bruno's death, his work fell into oblivion for a period of almost 190 years. This neglect of historical proportions came to an end as German Protestant philosopher Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819) drew attention to the Italian philosopher in his 1789 treatise *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (Jacobi, 2000). In this regard, it is of interest to note that Strauss wrote his 1921 dissertation titled *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der philosophischen Lehre Fr. H. Jacobis* under the supervision of neo-Kantian philosopher and theorist of the "symbolic forms" Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945). Despite the thematic focus of his dissertation, Strauss did not elaborate on the role played by the *Glaubensphilosoph* in the rediscovery of the disgraced Neapolitan thinker, whose writings had been banned years before his judicial murder at the stake by the Roman Catholic Church on February 17, 1600 at the Campo de' fiori in Rome. As G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) remarked, Bruno's works were "burnt, eradicated and kept secret" (Hegel, 1971, p. 23),<sup>10</sup> before his name disappeared from cultural memory. The ecclesiastical and civil censorship of his writings did not come as a surprise, since instead of following

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<sup>10</sup> "verbrannt, vertilgt und geheimgehalten." On the issue concerning the ecclesiastical ban on Bruno's books before and after his execution, see: Firpo, 1998, pp. 76-86.



the strategic path of *esoteric* writing, which Spinoza adopted decades later, Bruno conveyed his contrarian thought without recurring to cryptic messaging. This is especially true as regards Bruno's sexual views, which he displayed, so to speak, in plain light, albeit camouflaged under the mask of irony and sarcasm. A master of critical deconstruction, Bruno expressed his unsettling ideas on sexuality in a comedy and six dialogues, which were penned not in Latin, but exclusively *in volgare*. Critiquing the ubiquitous sexual binary in a language accessible to non-erudite audiences, Bruno posited gradual differentials within the male/female polarity in accordance with the fundamental premises of his ontology.

21. In an act of criminal concertation, the Roman Catholic Church and the *corte secolare* of Rome not only burnt Bruno alive but organized the public burning of his books as a way of marking the definitive victory over his heretic ideas. Beyond truncating the further development of Bruno's sexual thought initiated in *Candelaio*, his 1582 comedy written *in volgare*, the Church's annihilation strategy of the man and his oeuvre discouraged the reception of its discomfiting insights in the two centuries following his execution. As a late consequence of the ecclesiastical plot, sex scholars and theoreticians in the twentieth century have generally overlooked Bruno's philosophical and rhetorical moves designed to dismantle the ubiquitous conception of the male/female hiatus (see, for instance, Dall'Orto, 1988, Parte Quarta; Dall'Orto, 1989). Indeed, not even German-Jewish physician and sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld assessed Bruno's principled contentions in this regard, although his own critical sexology was grounded on monistic premises going back to Bruno's and Baruch de Spinoza's ontology. While it is safe to assume that Hirschfeld—a member of the *Deutscher Monistenbund* (see Herzer, 2001, p. 257)—was sufficiently aware of Bruno's disruptive stance on sexuality, his scattered remarks on the Late Renaissance philosopher are concerned in the main with the role that the sex-related accusations raised against him during the judicial process had played in his condemnation. Thus, Hirschfeld surmises that Bruno was given the death penalty not just

because of his heretical views on theological matters, but also on account of "his same-sex inclinations" (Hirschfeld, 1986, p. 138).<sup>11</sup> Conjectures of this kind, however, did not hinder Hirschfeld from characterizing Bruno as a "paladin of the spirit"<sup>12</sup> (Hirschfeld, 1928, p. 365) comparable to Socrates and Jesus of Nazareth (see Hirschfeld, 1930, p. 36). Against this backdrop, it is apposite to note that even if Bruno's life would not have ended at the stake, his path-breaking sexual thought provides ample reason for considering him a "queer hero" (Staebler, 2007).

22. Bruno's Italian oeuvre consisted of a comedy published in Paris in 1582 and six philosophical dialogues issued between 1583 and 1585 in England. While Bruno in his "roundly Neapolitan comedy" (Spampanato, 1921, p. 256)<sup>13</sup> published as *Candelaio* self-ironically portrays himself as an "Academician of No Academy; also known as The Annoyed" (Bruno, 2000, pp. 55-56),<sup>14</sup> his underlying design was to offer a philosophical overture that anticipated the key ideas and leitmotifs, which the six dialogues developed according to a consistent plan (see Ordine, 2002, pp. 39-42). In correspondence with the brightness its title evokes, *Candelaio* announces in its initial chapter an anti-obscurantist démarche seeking to dispel the somberness of the pedantry, which ecclesiastical dogmatism and Aristotelian scholasticism foster. Although the light shed by a candle "produced" or "held" by a *candelaio* is admittedly modest, its figurative meaning remits to the *Aurora* that enables the "true contemplation of nature" and thereby terminates the servitude of Reason (Bruno, 2002c, pp. 606-607).<sup>15</sup> In Bruno's diction, however, the term *candelaio* is meant not only as a trope for light and illumination, but also as a slang designation for sodomite, which leans on the popular view of candles as phallic symbols. In view of the intended association between philosophical

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<sup>11</sup> "seiner gleichgeschlechtlichen Neigungen"

<sup>12</sup> "Geisteshelden"

<sup>13</sup> "una commedia schiettamente napoletana"

<sup>14</sup> "Achademico di nulla Achademia; detto il fastidito"

<sup>15</sup> "vera contemplazion de la natura"

enlightenment and the sexual minority often referred to as a *τρίτον γένος* (Platon, 1990, pp. 266-269 [*Symposion* 189 d-e]), the comedy's title emerges as a catchy topos that blends sapiential lucidity and a form of sexuality generally considered to be derisive, monstrous, or satanic. It is not by chance that while the authorial Bruno initially declares rather pompously: "Candelaio, *that is*, Master Bonifacio" (Bruno, 2002b, p. 276; emphasis in original),<sup>16</sup> he soon goes on to depict the personage in unequivocally mocking terms: "A heteroclite baboon, a natural bollock, a moral dumbass, a tropologic beast, an anagogic ass" (Bruno, 2002b, p. 282).<sup>17</sup>

23. The sexual associations conjured by Master Bonifacio's extravagance and bizarrerie become apparent, when the derogatory and lewd meaning of the term *candelaio* is alluded to in several passages of the comedy's dedicatory text (see Bruno, 2002b, pp. 260-264). Thus, referring to the real person who presumably served as model for the figure of Bonifacio, Bruno remarks: "Give my regards to that other Candelaio of flesh and blood, of whom it is said that '*they will not inherit the Kingdom of God*'; and tell him not to enjoy himself so much" (Bruno, 2002b, p. 263).<sup>18</sup> Since the Paulinian passage, which Bruno cites in part, includes the *μαλακοί* (effeminates) as well as the *ἀρσενοκοῖται* (sodomites) among those who will not attain salvation (I *Corinthians* 6: 9), the quote subtly reinforces the sexual valence of the comedy's title and therefore the deviant nature of Bonifacio's sexual orientation and lifestyle. The relevancy and scope of these introductory precisions to the configuration and dénouement of the piece become manifest, at the latest, when Bonifacio's sexual preferences are discussed in connection with his marriage plans. As Carubina—the young prospective bride—seeks advice from her old confidante Angela Spigna about "Bonifacio

<sup>16</sup> "Candelaio, *id est* messer Bonifacio"

<sup>17</sup> "Un eteroclito babuino, un natural coglione, un moral menchione, una bestia tropologica, un asino anagogico"

<sup>18</sup> "Salutate da mia parte quell'altro Candelaio di carne et ossa, delle quali è detto che *Regnum Dei non possidebunt*; e ditegli che non goda tanto"

Trucco"—a family name portending his *tricky* nature—, Angela readily points out with regret: "Alas, I have heard that he is a *candelaio*" (Bruno, 2002b, p. 419; emphasis added).<sup>19</sup> Although Bonifacio's alleged sodomitic anormativity will play no role in Carubina's decision to marry him, the renewed reference to his same-sex dissidence preludes the announcement that Bonifacio is prepared to overstep the bounds of his transgressive sexual tastes through an equally transgressive manner of performing his marital duties. Taking exception to Bonifacio's nuptial intentions, Gioan Bernardo—Bruno's alter ego in the play—concisely conveys his outraged surprise, exclaiming: "You want to turn from *candelaio* to *aurifex*" (Bruno, 2002b, p. 296; emphasis added).<sup>20</sup>

24. Using alchemical diction, Gioan Bernardo suggests that Bonifacio's "transmutation" into a sexual *aurifex*—i.e. a "gold maker"—effectively implies his preparedness to potentiate his initial same-sex transgressiveness by practicing sodomitical intercourse with his future wife. Under the sign of derision, Bruno undermines the binary blueprint of sexuality that undergirds the Christian conception of the sexual order by pointing to Candelaio's same-sex perversion and to the transgression of this perversion by an apparent return to other-sex sexuality in the form of marital sodomy. While Bruno's design to subvert the male/female divide is suggested in several passages of *Candelaio*, its actual scope and implications can only be properly assessed if one considers the ontological and cosmological premises that frame the sexual anthropology of the writings *in volgare*. Against this backdrop, the sexual complexity and diversity of the individuals that populate the comedy are meant to dent the man/woman disjunction sanctioned by Christian theology, and bolster Bruno's non-creationist conception of "naturing Nature" (Bruno, 2002c, p.

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<sup>19</sup> "'Ma ehimè' [...], 'ho udito dir ch'è candelaio'"

<sup>20</sup> "Da candelaio volete doventar orefice." See also Bruno, 2002b, p. 266: "per che o più o meno intende il termino 'candelaio', ma non molto può capir che voglia dir 'orefice'"

702),<sup>21</sup> the all-pervasive, inexhaustible, and animating power, which enables the emergence of utterly diverse beings throughout the infinite cosmos. *Natura naturans*—to use Baruch de Spinoza's later Latin equivalence of the Brunian concept (Spinoza, 1980, p. 132 [Pars Prima, Propositio XXIX, Scholium])—thus stands for the metaphysical framework in which the dynamic correspondences between the human "microcosm" and the all-encompassing "macrocosm" (Bruno, 2002c, p. 672-673)<sup>22</sup> take place and in which the human being emerges as the entity most capable of reflecting and resuming the diversity that pervades all levels of the *scala naturae*. Denying any essential separateness between human nature and the nature of all other beings, Bruno suffices himself with asserting the greater aptitude of the human species to function as a recapitulative mirror of life's pervasive continuities.

25. Despite being a comedy, *Candelaio* touches on all major theoretical issues that Bruno's characters discuss in the six Italian dialogues, including the way to mend the dysfunctional societal cosmos the comedy mimics and derides. It is thus no surprise that the closing lines of the "Proprologo" of *Candelaio* mentions a long list of abuses and perversions the reader — perhaps "still with perplexity" (Bruno, 2002b, p. 281)—<sup>23</sup> comes across in the text. In anticipation of the sexual confusion provoked by the queer traits of Bonifacio/Candelaio, the list includes, among society's inherently puzzling phenomena, the existence of "virile females [and] effeminate males" (Bruno, 2002b, p. 281).<sup>24</sup> In this context, the authorial Bruno warns the reader that "you will see that there is nowhere anything certain: but rather much business, a lot of shortcomings, little beauty, and nothing good" (Bruno, 2002b, p. 281).<sup>25</sup> Following a similar line of argument, the comedy as a whole gradually

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<sup>21</sup> "natura naturante." For Baruch de Spinoza's use of the corresponding Latin expression *natura naturans*, see: Spinoza, 1980, p. 132 [Pars Prima, Propositio XXIX, Scholium].

<sup>22</sup> "megacosmo [...] microcosmo"

<sup>23</sup> "ancor in confuso"

<sup>24</sup> "femine virile, effeminati maschii"

<sup>25</sup> "vedrete in tutto non esser cosa di sicuro: ma assai di negozio, difetto a bastanza, poco di bello, e nulla di buono"

reveals a propaedeutic inventory of deceits, pretenses, and half-truths that prompts—as *De l'infinito* programmatically suggests—the Brunian decision to "turn upside down the reversed world" (Bruno, 2002e, p. 112).<sup>26</sup> Bruno's philosophical *sanatio ex radice* of the putrid societal cosmos calls not only for a revitalization of the existing sciences, but a meticulous epistemic revision of the categorial tools deployed in the different fields of knowledge. As his repeated references to non-normative sexualities convey, Bruno set out to scrutinize not only the general validity assigned to the male/female chasm, but also the incipient attempts to bridge it by a finite number of categorial supplements. This examination is all the more urgent, as the subsumption of individuals under compartmentalized sexual categories constitutes for Bruno one of the most conspicuous hindrances to the adequate grasp of the rich complexities that inhere in human nature.

26. Bruno's philosophy evinces an overarching counter-reductionist move that Nolanus scholar Roberto Oddo has termed *sconfinamento* (enlargement, "de-finitization") (Oddo, 2001, p. 2). Accordingly, "the new sun" of the philosopher's "clear concepts" (Bruno, 2002c, p. 614)<sup>27</sup> sheds light on the most problematic of all theoretical instrumentalities regarding sexuality: the sexual binary or, to use a more precise Brunian term, the "bimembrum" of man and woman as the organizing principle of sexual difference. It is for a reason that none other than sexually glittering *Candelaio* contributes to the task of bringing limpidity into the gloominess of the dichotomous sexual regime. Following the example of "Democritus, Epicurus, and many others who have contemplated nature with eyes wide open and have not proven deaf to her pressing voices" (Bruno, 2002e, p. 161),<sup>28</sup> Bruno's observation-based reflections on sexuality undergird the counterintuitive notion that "the most common sense is not the truest one" (Bruno,

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<sup>26</sup> "mettere sotto sopra il mondo rinversato"

<sup>27</sup> "il nuovo sole de tuoi chiari concetti"

<sup>28</sup> "Democrito, Epicuro et altri molti, che con gli occhi più aperti han contemplata la natura, e non si sono presentati sordi alle importune voci di quella"

2002c, p. 658).<sup>29</sup> Thus, while binary patterns of thought possess, for simple minds, the attractiveness of the self-evident, they are, in truth, the source of epistemic shortcomings that distort the complexities and nuances of living Nature. On this assumption, *La cena de le Ceneri* outlines a critique of "the scale of the binary number" (Bruno, 2002f, p. 434),<sup>30</sup> Bruno's terminological phrase for the disjunctive blueprint that subtends the prevalent, albeit thoughtless categorizing of human sexuality. At the beginning of the passage under consideration, pedant Prudenizio asks Teofilo—the "God-loving" impersonation of Bruno in the dialogue—to explain his reasons for advancing the notion that "the binary number is mysterious" (Bruno, 2002f, p. 442).<sup>31</sup>

27. In his reply, Teofilo avoids addressing the actual question asked by Prudenizio, sufficing himself with the enumeration of a whole range of instances that purportedly presuppose the binary, including "the species of numbers: odd and even, of which one is male, the other female" (Bruno, 2002f, p. 442).<sup>32</sup> Ostensibly coming in support of Teofilo, Frulla—whose very name hints at the triviality of his views—offers "another scale of the binary" (Bruno, 2002f, p. 443),<sup>33</sup> which combines Old and New Testament instances of binarity with their pagan pendants, but ultimately amounts to making more obvious his untenable attempt to answer Prudenizio's query by adducing examples. Heightening the parodic turn of the discussion, Prudenizio commends in Latin, but not without candor, the ingeniousness of Frulla's instantiations.<sup>34</sup> Contrary to Prudenizio's expectations, however, Frulla seizes the occasion to thank him for the compliment with a wittingly ambiguous reply: "I am proudly rejoiced, Master Prudenizio,

<sup>29</sup> "Il senso più comune non è il più vero"

<sup>30</sup> "la scala del numero binario"

<sup>31</sup> "il numero binario è misterioso"

<sup>32</sup> "le spezie di numeri: pare et impare, de quali l'una è maschio, l'altra è femina"

<sup>33</sup> "un'altra scala del binario"

<sup>34</sup> Prudenizio's Latin praise reads: "*Optimae indolis ingenium, enumeratio minime contemnenda*." (Bruno, 2002f, p. 444; emphasis in original.) [*A talent of excellent quality, an incontestable enumeration!*]

that you approve of my speech, for you, being more prudent than prudence, are prudence *masculini generis*" (Bruno, 2002f, pp. 444-445; emphasis in original).<sup>35</sup> Frulla's praise of Prudenizio's "male" prudence reflects his biased assumption concerning the superiority of men over women, while suggesting that Prudenizio's supposed advantage is actually the result of his usurping an essentially feminine trait. By hinting at Prudenizio's own "male" re-gendering of "female" prudence, Frulla subtly evokes and reinforces the popular Renaissance association of pedants with the practices of pederastic inverts. Thus, from the perspective of Frulla's subliminal denunciation, Prudenizio emerges as a living objection against the deployment of the binary sexual scheme, regardless of his own initial approval of Frulla's theo-mythological exemplifications of the *bimembrum*.

28. Unwittingly advancing the Brunian critical program of world-historical reversal, Prudenizio—as a male travesty of *Prudentia*—contributes to questioning—and thus demystifying—the numinous aura of "the scale of the binary number." Notwithstanding his effete theatricality, Prudenizio epitomizes the earnest challenge posed by the sexual dissident to being subsumed under one of the two mutually exclusive man/woman alternatives, which, despite being generally considered self-evident, remain counterproductively reductive. Although Frulla's insinuations about the pedant's (real or imagined) sexuality aim, in the last resort, at questioning and disrupting the universal validity attributed to the sexual disjunction, Prudenizio's counter-exemplarity is not meant to suggest the transformation of sexual binarity into a closed triadic scheme. Positing a unified *third* sexual alternative as a supplement to the man/woman dichotomy would fail to do justice to the differentiation between "virile females" and "effeminate males" (Bruno, 2002b, p. 284)<sup>36</sup> that Bruno mentions in the "Proprologo" of *Candelaio*. Furthermore, a

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<sup>35</sup> "Io mi glorio, messer Prudenizio mio, per che voi approvate il mio discorso, che sète più prudente che l'istessa prudenzia, perciò che sète la prudenzia *masculini generis*."

<sup>36</sup> "femine virile, effeminati maschii"



one-size-fits-all supplement to the man/woman disjunction would be at odds with the nuanced discussion, toward the end of the fourth act of the comedy, which focuses on the categorization of Mamfurio's sexuality in view of the diversity of sexes/genders advanced by a contemporary and widely consulted systematization of the Latin grammar. The noteworthy passage in *Candelaio* begins with a question asked by Sanguino, a poorly educated discussant, in a derisively distorted Latin. The literal wording of his question is thus: "*Cennera nomino quotta sunt?*" (Bruno, 2002b, p. 372; emphasis in original). In standard Latin, Sanguino's query would read: *Genera nominum quot sunt?* — that is: *How many genders of substantives are there?*

29. In his reply, archetypically pedant Mamfurio argues that, besides the masculine and feminine genders, there are "the *neuter*, which is neither the one nor the other, the *common*, which is one and the other," and finally, "the *epicenum*, which does not distinguish one sex from the other" (Bruno, 2002b, p. 372; emphasis in original).<sup>37</sup> Consequent to Mamfurio's enumeration of the gender alternatives beyond the masculine/feminine dichotomy, Sanguino picks on his slight shift from "genero" to "sexo" when explaining the *epicenum*, and gives the discussion a personal and inquisitorial twist by asking: "Which of all these are you? Are you perhaps epicene?" (Bruno, 2002b, p. 372).<sup>38</sup> Trying to dodge Sanguino's pressing questions, Mamfurio repeats in Latin what he has already said in *volgare* about the "epicene," but to no avail. His conceptual shift from (grammatical) "geno"/ "gender" to (natural) "sexo"/ "sex" makes it easier for Sanguino to distort whatever assertion Mamfurio comes up with and to present it as further evidence of his expertise in "l'arte da spellechiar capretti" (Bruno, 2002b, p. 373) (literally: "the art of flaying young goats") – an obscene metaphor for pederasty. Regardless of Mamfurio's presumed or owned sexuality, the discussion reveals Bruno's preparedness to consider sexual modes beyond the

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<sup>37</sup> "'*neutrum*' quel che non è l'uno né l'altro, '*comune*' quel che è l'uno et altro [...] '*epicenum*', quel che non distingue l'un sexo da l'altro"

<sup>38</sup> "Quale di tutti questi sète voi? sète forse epiceno?"

man/woman disjunction. Historically, positing a suppletive alternative to the male and female sexes within a closed triadic construct was intended to mend the insufficiencies inherent to the sexual disjunction by creating a conceptual space for a non-binary category deemed to complete and closure what is representable as sex. Since it would appear at first that Sanguino fails to entice Mamfurio into accepting being subsumed under the supplementary *epicene* category, the ill-educated attempts henceforth to distort what the pedant says about grammatical gender as though it were an advocacy for male same-sex sexuality.

30. True to his bookishness, Mamfurio answers the query about the first thing he teaches children at school, by citing in Latin a phrase from *Commentarii grammatici* by Jean Despautères (1460-1520) that reads: "Omne viro soli quod convenit, esto virile" (Bruno, 2002b, p. 372).<sup>39</sup> Mamfurio then translates the quote: "That which is convenient only for a man is virile" (Bruno, 2002b, p. 372).<sup>40</sup> Since, as could be expected, the actual meaning of the sentence escapes Sanguino, he accuses Mamfurio of instructing his pupils about "the virile member" (Bruno, 2002b, p. 372).<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Sanguino surreptitiously substitutes Mamfurio's notion of a gender "convenient" to males by the idea of the sexual organ "apposite" to them, and ends up suggesting that the pompous humanist propounds the outrageously sodomitical view that the penis—not the vagina—is the organ naturally suitable for males. Pitying Sanguino for belonging to the class of "non-erudites" (Bruno, 2002b, p. 373),<sup>42</sup> Mamfurio makes a last attempt at clarification, pointing out that what Sanguino is referring to—i.e., the penis—"belongs to males *proprie et ut pars*, and to females *ut portio, et attributive vel applicative*"

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<sup>39</sup> The sentence Mamfurio quotes is at the beginning of *Liber primus de nominum generibus* der "dispauteriana grammatica": Despauterius, 1563, p. 27. In this edition the sentence reads: "Omne viro soli, quod conuenit, esto virile."

<sup>40</sup> "quel che convien a l'uomo solamente, è virile"

<sup>41</sup> "il membro virile"

<sup>42</sup> "ineruditi"

(Bruno, 2002b, p. 373; emphasis in original).<sup>43</sup> Since for Sanguino these precisions appear to be even less comprehensible than the original Despauterian quote, he interprets them as a corroboration of his suspicions about humanist Mamfurio's pederastic leanings. As the result of this part of the discussion shows, the comedy does not seek to elucidate the pertinence of Sanguino's insidious allegations or the truth about Mamfurio's sexual orientation, but, rather, to expose the derisive incompetence of two equally unworthy disputants to deal with the complexities of sexual difference.

31. While Sanguino stands for the ignorant advocate of other-sex sexuality as the purportedly sole sexual combinatory in accordance with nature, Mamfurio embodies the disreputable pedant whose vapid remarks betray his incapacity to think for himself and scrutinize thoroughly the feeble foundations of the regnant sexual order. Unlike Teofilo in *La cena* or Filoteo in *De l'infinito*, the interlocutors in *Candelaio* are far from echoing Bruno's own views on the issues under consideration. Their discussions, however, are a welcomed occasion for articulating problems and views that, at the time, could hardly have been theorized in the context of academic discourse. Although Bruno cautiously points out that nothing in the Italian pieces needs to be taken as though "said by me in an assertive manner" (Bruno, 2002g, p. 177),<sup>44</sup> they offered him a fictional framework where he felt free to present sexual insights and opinions that countered the ecclesiastically sanctioned teachings with which civil society and its forms of intimate cohesiveness had to comply. Against this backdrop, it becomes apparent that the lifestyle and assertions of disruptive Bonifacio/Candelaio serve, first and foremost, as narrative support for articulating a trailblazing outlook that examines, questions, and lastly rejects the validity claims raised by the advocates of the man/woman disjunction and the exclusive legitimacy of other-sex sexuality. Given that the observable diversity of the physiological sexes and their innumerable

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<sup>43</sup> "è di maschii *proprie et ut pars*, et è di femine *ut portio, et attributive vel applicative*"

<sup>44</sup> "detto da me come assertivamente"

behavioral patterns counter the deployment of close subsumptive schemes of sexuality, the potential *in-finitization* of sexual forms becomes the sine qua non for the adequate grasp of what it means to be "truly human beings" (Bruno, 2002f, p. 523).<sup>45</sup>

32. It is certainly not by chance that Bruno epitomizes Tiresias—the prototypically trans-sexual and trans-gender seer of Classical mythology—not only as a "blind, albeit divine interpreter" (Bruno, 2002f, p. 448),<sup>46</sup> but also, and more importantly, as a "furioso," a godly inspired "enthusiast," who attained the highest possible realization of the human type. Since an essential aspect of the antique mytheme explaining the seer's celebrity highlights his purported transformation into a woman for a period of seven years, Tiresias's transsexual persona betokens the ambit of sexual mutability in which Bonifacio's much less dramatic morphing from same-sex "candelaio" to other-sex (albeit sodomitical) "orifice" takes place. In general, Tiresias's significance in Bruno's sexual thought is thoroughly consistent with the philosopher's interpretive approach of mythology as a revelatory source of humanity's self-knowledge. Hence, the Tiresian myth corroborates Bruno's proto-Feuerbachian contention in *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante* that bisexual and pederastic Jupiter—the father of the gods—"represents each one of us" (Bruno, 2002g, p. 185).<sup>47</sup> On this assumption, the dialogue readily expands on the same-sex escapades of "the great Patriarch of the gods" (Bruno, 2002g, p. 230)<sup>48</sup> and on how he deals with the consequences of his own carnal peccadillos.<sup>49</sup> As the dialogue further details, Jupiter contributed, in younger years, to the moral decline of the Olympian pantheon, but then, fearing to lose his supernal preeminence, decided to carry out a general reform that aimed at improving the ethical standards

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<sup>45</sup> "veramente uomini"

<sup>46</sup> "cieco, ma divino interprete"

<sup>47</sup> "rapresenta ciascun di noi"

<sup>48</sup> "'il gran Patriarca de gli Dei"

<sup>49</sup> For representations of the Olympian gods and their love affairs in Italian and Dutch visual art from the sixteenth and seventeenth century, see: *Olympische Goden / Olympic Gods*, 1998, especially pp. 9, 19, 36-55.

of his celestial co-inhabitants. Remindful of these events, divine, albeit mouthy Sofia—a foremost Olympian dweller—observes that Jupiter, "as if subdued by time, is beginning to break away from lasciviousness, vices, and those conditions which are implied by virility and youth" (Bruno, 2002g, p. 199).<sup>50</sup>

33. To substantiate her priggish objections to Jupiter's sexual vita, Sofia mentions—among other piquant details—his love affair with Ganymede, whose

charm had the power to seduce Jupiter from heaven and caused him to be snatched by Jupiter into heaven, wherefore the son of a human being was deified, and the father of the gods became a bird (Bruno, 2002g, p. 205).<sup>51</sup>

This reference to Jupiter's protean and trans-generic love affair is of import not only because it reveals the sexual polymorphousness inscribed in humanity's divine prototype, but because it allows to better understand Jupiter's decision to enjoin "all the gods not to have pages or gentlemen of the bedchamber of a lesser age than twenty-five" (Bruno, 2002g, p. 205).<sup>52</sup> Since prohibiting *all* the gods from keeping "under-aged" attendants is meaningful only if they *all* partake in Jupiter's same-sex and pederastic proclivities, the Olympian divinities—individually and collectively—evinces themselves as accurate mirrors of the repressed disruptiveness that marks human sexuality. Indicatively, a concurrent injunction of Momo, a hypercritical co-inhabitant of the Olympus, rests on similar premises. As ever gossipy and sanctimonious Sofia expounds, Momo

prohibited Cupid from wandering in the presence of men, heroes, and gods so unclad as is his custom; and enjoined him to cease offending the sight of the denizens

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<sup>50</sup> "come domo dal tempo, comincia a declinare da le lascivie e vizii, e quelle condizioni che la virilitade e gioventude apportan seco"

<sup>51</sup> "grazia [...] fu potente a rapir Giove dal cielo, e farlo essere rapito da Giove in cielo: et onde il figlio d'un uomo venne deificato, et ucellato il padre de gli dèi"

<sup>52</sup> "a tutti gli dèi di non aver paggi o cubicularii di minore etade che di vinticinque anni"

of heaven by demonstrating his buttocks in the Milky Way and Olympian Senate, and to go around, from then on, dressed at least from the waist down (Bruno, 2002g, p. 204).<sup>53</sup>

34. The depictions, hyperbolizations and caricatures of individuals beyond the pale of sexual binarity in Bruno's Italian works are suggestive of an incremental attempt to undermine the validation pervasively accorded to the axiom pedant Prudenzius adduces in *La cena*: "*Omnis divisio debet esse bimembris, vel reducibilis ad bimembrem*" (Bruno, 2002f, p. 480; emphasis in original).<sup>54</sup> Although the sexual characters

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<sup>53</sup> "Ha vietato a Cupido d'andar più vagando in presenza de gli uomini, eroi e dèi cossì sbracato come ha di costume, et ingiontoli che non offenda oltre la vista de celicoli mostrando le natiche per la via lattea, et Olimpico senato: ma che vada per l'avenire vestito almeno da la cintura a basso"

<sup>54</sup> "Every division must be a dichotomy or be reducible to a dichotomy." As regards this sentence, Giovanni Aquilecchia explains in a footnote: "Allusione al principio delle divisioni dicotomiche della logica di Pierre de la Ramée, logica che, all'epoca, si stava diffondendo in tutte le università inglesi" (Bruno, 2002f, p. 480, note 61). Aquilecchia refers in this connection to scholarly literature, but without directly quoting the relevant treatises on the issue written by Petrus Ramus (1515-1572), such as *Dialectica institutiones* (1543), *La Dialectique* (1555) and *Dialecticae libri duo* (1572 edition). Irrespective of the issue concerning the reception of Petrus Ramus in Bruno's work, it should be kept in mind that the sentence quoted by Prudenzius regarding the ultimate dichotomous character of all divisions actually corresponds to the elucidations, which influential philosopher and Aristotle commentator Johannes Buridanus (ca. 1300 – ca. 1378) set forth, more than two centuries earlier, in his best-known work titled *Summulae de dialectica*. In the eighth treatise titled *De demonstrationibus*, Buridanus explains: "Ex his etiam apparet quomodo debemus intelligere istas proprietates quae solent attribui bonis divisionibus, scilicet quod *omnis bona divisio debet dari per opposita et debet esse bimembris vel reducibilis ad bimembrem*" (Buridanus, 2001, p. 24 [8.1.8. De divisionibus minus proprie dictis]). // "And from this it is clear how we should understand the properties usually assigned to good divisions, namely, that *every good division should be given in terms of opposites, and it should be twofold or reducible to a twofold division*" (Buridan, 2001, p. 629; emphasis added). Against this backdrop, it seems safe to assume that Bruno in his discussion of the logical *bimembrum* resorts to a formulation of the principle, whose historical influence was arguably independent from the diffusion of Petrus Ramus' *Logic* in English universities.

that escape the categorial contrivances of the sexual disjunction may appear as exceptions to the ubiquitous distributional pattern, a closer consideration of Bruno's ontological premises makes it patent that he could not have sufficed himself with just complementing the male/female dichotomy with a finite categorial expansion. Rather, he challenged the alleged self-evidence of two mutually exclusive sexes in the name of the counter-intuitive notion of sexualities as numerous as the number of sexed individuals. Bruno's *in-finitizing* reconceptualization of sexual difference follows from his ontology of matter concerning the emergence of uniquely configured bodies throughout the universe. On this assumption, the non-normative sexualities of specific individuals depicted in the writings *in volgare* are tokens of the inexhaustible variability of material Nature, which lastly entails that any closed categorial scheme of sexual distribution constitutes *realiter* a void set. As constantly varying emergences from *natura naturante*, all human individuals are marked—without exception—by a sexual complexity that disrupts the conveniently simplistic templates, which have been deployed by sexual taxologies throughout history. The allegedly contrarian sexualities displayed in Bruno's Italian writings are thus not exceptions, but just salient instantiations of the general premise advanced in *Furori* to the effect "that there is no precise equality in natural things" (Bruno, 2002d, p. 708).<sup>55</sup>

35. According to Bruno, the difference that sets apart one individual thing from all others is the result of "the diversity of dispositions of matter" (Bruno, 2002c, p. 663),<sup>56</sup> an axiom he develops in detail, for instance, in the 1591 Latin treatise *De triplici minimo et mensura*.<sup>57</sup> Since the endless

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<sup>55</sup> "che non si dà equalità puntuale nelle cose naturali"

<sup>56</sup> "la diversità delle disposizioni della materia"

<sup>57</sup> This idea is confirmed in *De triplici minimo et mensura* (1591): "Naturae sylva quia nusquam progenitricis / Consimilem omnino partem parti opperiemus, / Ut similes atomis atomos [...]." [In the forest of birthing nature we will find neither a part that would be similar to another part, nor atoms similar to other atoms.] (Bruno, 1889, p. 196); "Non sunt duo pondera, longa, / Voces, harmoniae, numeri exaequata per omne; / Motus

combinatories of material dispositions determine the singularity of even the most elementary of natural things, their sway becomes all the more perceptible in beings evincing the constitutional and behavioral complexity of human individuals. Furthermore, since humans are—as Bruno often reminds his readers—the most competent creatures to mirror "the variety of all the others" (Bruno, 2002c, p. 615)<sup>58</sup> as they emerge from the "bosom and viscera of the earth" (Bruno, 2002f, p. 556),<sup>59</sup> reductive categorizations amount to undoing the human preeminence when it comes to recapitulating the perplexing complexities of Being. It goes without saying that Bruno's writings *in volgare* occasionally feature personages with a strong tendency toward categorial generalizations. This is the case, for instance, when Polihimnio, reflecting the antifeminist prejudices of his time, contends that women "are a *chaos* of irrationality, a *hyle* of crime, a forest of infamy, a mass of filth, an aptitude for all perdition" (Bruno, 2002c, p. 701; emphasis in original).<sup>60</sup> Bruno's own stance on the issue, however, is at the antipodes of such denigrations, given that he conceptualizes the ontological role of matter by recurring to the blueprint of feminine reproductive physiology. Thus, instead of following the Aristotelian view on matter as a "daughter of privation, and similar to the irreparable greediness of the vigorous female" (Bruno, 2002c, p. 605),<sup>61</sup> Bruno explicitly rejects in *De la causa* the attribution of appetite to matter. Against the premise of the primacy of forms over the material substrate they impregnate, Bruno posits that matter is not dependent on the reception of such forms to attain plenitude and perfection.

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nec duo sunt, motus partesve per omne / Aequales." [There are no two weights, lengths / voices, harmonies, numbers that would be equal to each other in every respect, / nor two movements or parts of a movement that would be in every respect equal to one another.] (Bruno, 1889, p. 203).

<sup>58</sup> "de tute l'altre la varietade"

<sup>59</sup> "grembo e viscere della terra"

<sup>60</sup> "sono un *chaos* de irrazionalità, *hyle* di scleraggini, selva di ribalderie, massa di immundizie, aptitudine ad ogni perdizione"

<sup>61</sup> "figlia de la privazione, e simile a l'ingordiggia irreparabile de la vagliente femina"



36. Seeking to reverse the Aristotelian ontological hierarchy, Teofilo asks the quasi-rhetorical question that, since matter is self-contained and "receives nothing from form, why should it desire it?" (Bruno, 2002c, p. 722).<sup>62</sup> On the assumption that matter "sends forth the forms from her bosom, and therefore has them within herself" (Bruno, 2002c, p. 722)<sup>63</sup>, Teofilo reiterates his inquiry: "So why should she long for them?" (Bruno, 2002c, p. 722).<sup>64</sup> The aim of this portion of the argument is to underpin the Brunian view that "form, rather, must desire matter in order to maintain itself, since when the former separates itself from the latter, it loses its existence" (Bruno, 2002c, p. 723).<sup>65</sup> To bring the point home, Bruno uses in his writings pregnant expressions such as "womb of matter" (Bruno, 2002d, p. 569),<sup>66</sup> "the maternal womb of Nature" (Bruno, 2002g, pp. 374-375),<sup>67</sup> and "womb and viscera of the Earth" (Bruno, 2002f, p. 556).<sup>68</sup> The theoretical design behind these figures of speech is to highlight the exuberant potencies of *mater/materia* as a "principle" of origin that counters the restrictive (and thus defining) contours of forms on which teleological causality depends (see Bruno, 2002c, pp. 600-601; 650-651). Against this backdrop, it becomes apparent that the argumentative move, which goes from the derisive antifeminism in the depictions propounded by the champions of the sexual chasm toward the thorough philosophical dismantlement of gynophobic prejudices, is meant to bolster the emergence of the post-patriarchal sexual regime, which the Brunian *uomo eteroclito* envisions as part of the rebirth of life's "old things" (Bruno, 2002e, p. 135). Primarily targeting the ontological and epistemic primacy, which Aristotle accords to forms as determinants of concrete things, Bruno maintains that these are mere accidents of the one, eternal, material substrate that subtends the ambit of the "vicissitude of

<sup>62</sup> "non riceve cosa alcuna de la forma, perché volete che la appetisca?"

<sup>63</sup> "ella manda dal suo seno le forme e per conseguenza le ha in sé"

<sup>64</sup> "come volete che le appetisca?"

<sup>65</sup> "forma più tosto deve desiderar la materia per perpetuarsi perché separandosi da quella perde l'essere lei"

<sup>66</sup> "grembo de la materia"

<sup>67</sup> "materno grembo de la natura"

<sup>68</sup> "grembo e viscere della terra"

transmutation" (Bruno, 2002c, p. 742),<sup>69</sup> in which contraries play out their endless combinatories.

37. In the final scene of *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo*, the penultimate dialogue *in volgare*, the symbol of the ass attains "a role of absolute preeminence" (Ordine, 1996, p. 15),<sup>70</sup> as is suggested by the rejoicement of the protagonist Asino—i.e., "ass"—at the arrival of "il mio Cillenio," a flying ass whose very name betrays his Mercurial provenance. Given his intention to become not merely a human being, but a "humanist," Asino draws attention in his salutation to the morphing abilities of the divine visitor, eulogizing him as:

delightful, winged messenger of Jupiter, faithful interpreter of the will of all the gods, generous donator of the sciences, man among men, among women woman, wretched among the wretched, blissful among the blissful, among all everything (Bruno, 2002a, p. 483).<sup>71</sup>

As this asinine, quasi-liturgical doxology conveys, Cillenio is the celestial impersonation of universal mutability, which, needless to say, includes the ability to undergo sexual transmutations. Being "tra tutti tutto," Cillenio embodies divine Sophia's teaching in *Spaccio*: "in everything there is everything; and especially, there is one contrary, where the other [also occurs]; and the latter is derived from the former" (Bruno, 2002g, p. 279).<sup>72</sup> As repeatedly hinted at by Bruno, universal mutability does not affect the core of eternal matter itself, but only the "surface of matter" (Bruno, 2002c, p. 721),<sup>73</sup> that is, the ontological dimension where the generation and corruption of concrete individuals take place. Moreover, all the

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<sup>69</sup> "vicissitudine di trasmutazione." See also the expressions: "la vicissitudine de la rinovazione" (Bruno, 2002f, p. 517); and "le vicissitudini della generazione e corruzione delle cose" (Bruno, 2002a, p. 457).

<sup>70</sup> "un ruolo di assoluta preminenza"

<sup>71</sup> "il vago aligero, nuncio di Giove, fido interprete della volontà de tutti gli dèi, largo donator de le scienze, [...] uomo tra gli uomini, tra le donne donna, disgraziato tra disgraziati, tra beati beato, tra tutti tutto"

<sup>72</sup> "in ogni cosa è ogni cosa, e massime è l'uno dove è l'altro contrario, e questo massime si cava da quello"

<sup>73</sup> "superficie della materia"

movements, changes, and transmutations that inchoate, sustain and end the existence of things are, as Sofia minutely formulates,

from contraries, through contraries, into contraries, to contraries: and where there is contrariety, there is action and reaction, there is motion, there is diversity, there is multiplicity, there is order, there are degrees, there is succession, there is vicissitude (Bruno, 2002g, p. 198).<sup>74</sup>

38. On the core issue of mutability, *De la causa* specifies that "it is impossible that things, in any regard, [...] be subjected to death *concerning their substance*" (Bruno, 2002c, p. 599; emphasis added).<sup>75</sup> Thus, it is only as "accidents" of the sole eternal substance, that individual things "change their visage, and transform themselves" (Bruno, 2002c, p. 599).<sup>76</sup> Given that in the plenitude of the material universe, there is no need to premise Aristotelian *στέρησις* (privation), Bruno denies the idea that a contrary *takes the place* of—or is *substituted* by—another, positing, instead, that they *originate*—as Sofia would have it—in each other. From this perspective, Cillenio's mercurial transformations prove to be non-discrete gradations between the contraries, which "accidental" beings evince in their becoming. Since notwithstanding its fundamental "one-ness," the living material substance never gives signs of repetitiveness in the worlds it brings about, achieving philosophical knowledge depends on realizing that no finite taxonomic blueprint can do justice to the diversity of singular forms that emerge and eventually disappear never to return. True to the canon that "the eyes are made for distinguishing and recognizing differences" (Bruno, 2002g, p. 291),<sup>77</sup> Bruno's ontology necessitates open-ended frames of intelligibility to cope with the diversity of beings as determined by the specific

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<sup>74</sup> "da contrarii, per contrarii, ne' contrarii, a contrarii: e dove è la contrarietà, è la azione e reazione, è il moto, è la diversità, è la moltitudine, è l'ordine, son gli gradi, è la successione, è la vicissitudine"

<sup>75</sup> "è impossibile che in punto alcuno cosa veruna vegga la corrosione, o vegna a morte secondo la sustanza"

<sup>76</sup> "si cangie di volto, e si trasmute or sotto una or sotto un'altra composizione, per una o per un'altra disposizione"

<sup>77</sup> "Gli occhi son fatti per distinguere e conoscere le differenze"

configuration of their contraries. In view of the interminable sexual nuances that the "omniforme sustanza" (Bruno, 2002c, p. 604) manifests to those "who not in vain have opened their eyes" (Bruno, 2002c, p. 599),<sup>78</sup> the male/female complementarity that organizes from within each individual sexuality cannot be mistaken for a fixed sexual pattern that posits an arbitrary separation between the supposedly disjunctive sexes. In the last resort, the hypostatized man/woman *bimembrum* loses its *raison d'être* in a world, where endless gradations between the male/female contraries configure the sexual uniqueness of individuals.

39. Considering Bruno's principled *in-finitization* of the cosmos, his commentators have usually empathized with the words he exclaims in the dedication of *Candelaio*: "With this philosophy my spirit enlarges, and my intellect expands" (Bruno, 2002c, p. 263).<sup>79</sup> The same commentators, however, have ignored the anthropological scope and import of Bruno's *in-finitization* of the sexes as a corollary of the exuberance of *natura naturante*. In view of this unconscionable neglect, it is apposite to draw attention to Teofilo's reference in *La cena* to Copernicus' remapping of the solar system. His appraisal of the astronomer's achievements gives a hint on what Bruno could have said as regards his own new charting of sexual difference. Signally, Bruno's spokesperson in the dialogue not only praises Copernicus' impressive accomplishments, but also brings to mind that they trump whatever shortcomings his undertakings may have displayed:

Who would be so rude and vulgar regarding the endeavors of this man and forget all he has achieved [...]? Who would judge him for what he *has not been able to achieve*, and count him among the gregarious populace that speaks, orients itself, and rushes in

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<sup>78</sup> "che non in vano hanno aperti gli occhi"

<sup>79</sup> "Con questa filosofia l'animo mi s'aggrandisse, e me si magnifica l'intelletto"

correspondence to the pronouncements of a brutal and mean belief? (Bruno, 2002f, p. 450; emphasis added).<sup>80</sup> That Bruno possibly assessed his own achievements along similar lines, is suggested when he refers to the difficulties in overcoming "the great force" inherent in the "habit of believing" that hinders "the understanding of the most evident things" (Bruno, 2002f, p. 464).<sup>81</sup> While Bruno lucidly anticipated the initial disregard for his trailblazing insights into the mercurial nature of sexuality, his foresight did not lessen his confidence in the final triumph of the sexual-anthropological shift his ontology made inevitable.

40. As already pointed out, Bruno's critique of the sexual *bimembrum* for the sake of *in-finitizing* the number of sexual forms was nothing Strauss could have been willing to cope with. His disregard for Bruno's philosophy and sexual thought evokes his reluctance to assume philosophically the consequences of his exegetical scrutiny of Adam's creational androgyny according to *Genesis* 1:27. Needless to say, assuming the anthropological truth of the Torah's teaching would have profoundly unsettled Strauss' own understanding of patriarchal "Man" living under political regimes that rely on the Mosaic and Platonic "codes" of the Law. While not acknowledging it directly, Straus was certainly aware that the Midrashic and Kabbalistic grasp of the *Adam Kadmon*—the hermaphroditic/androgynous creature formed in correspondence to the "bi-sexual"  $\text{אֱלֹהִים}$  of the Holy One—contradicted the theo-anthropological foundations of the political philosophy he developed in the course of his life.

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<sup>80</sup> "Chi dunque sarà sì villano e discortese verso il studio di quest'uomo, ch'avendo posto in oblio quel tanto che ha fatto per esser ordinato da gli dèi come una aurora, che dovea precedere l'uscita di questo sole de l'antiqua vera filosofia, per tanti secoli sepolta nelle tenebrose caverne de la cieca, maligna, proterva et invida ignoranza, vogli, notandolo per *quel che non ha possuto fare*, metterlo nel medesimo numero della gregaria moltitudine che discorre, si guida e si precipita più per il senso de l'orechio d'una brutale et ignobil fede [...]."

<sup>81</sup> "quanta forza abbia la consuetudine di credere, et esser nodrito da fanciullezza in certe persuasioni, ad impedirne da l'intelligenza de cose manifestissime"

Although Bruno's onto-theological thought was meant as a break with the premises of the Judeo-Christian revelation, his conception of the individual's non-disjunctive sexuality emblemized by the *uomo eteroclito* is akin to the notion of the Adamic human being as quintessentially androgynous, which the Torah and an integral part of the Jewish exegetical tradition sanction. Against this backdrop, it is all the more regrettable that Strauss as a Jewish thinker decided not to confront the far-reaching implications of the first narrative of Adam's creation for philosophical anthropology. Given that Strauss as a historian of philosophy had focused in his dissertation on the work of Bruno-researcher Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, and eventually became a prominent Spinozian scholar and expert in the "art" of close reading, there seems to be no sound reasons as to why Strauss ignored the challenge posed by Bruno's sexual thought to his own rather trivial assertions concerning the man/woman hiatus.

41. By banning androgyny to the realm of "fantastic thing[s]" (Strauss, 2001, p. 127), Strauss sought to preempt any possible objections raised by counter-reductionist critiques of the man/woman binary for the sake of positing gradual differences between de-hypostatized sexual contraries. Accordantly, Strauss felt free to discard Charles Darwin's explicit universalization of human androgyny as an epistemic corollary of evolution history and theory. Therewith, Strauss lost sight of the empirical challenge posed by the history of life to ideological sanctions of the phantasmatic male/female disjunction. His antimodernist stance prevented him from even taking notice of the counterintuitive conception of sexes as numerous as the number of sexed individuals, which his older German contemporary Magnus Hirschfeld had advanced as the cornerstone of his Darwinian-based sexology. Strauss' guiding premise that a "return" to pre-modern philosophy was possible certainly proved serviceable to the kind of political theory he proposed, but implied recoiling from assessing the anthropological relevancy of emerging re-conceptualizations of

sexual difference.<sup>82</sup> At the antipodes of Strauss' démarche, Andrea Dworkin overtly embraced Darwin's grasp of universal androgyny, envisioning an ontology of sexuality that does not exclude those androgynes willing and having the capacity to procreate. In *Woman Hating*, Dworkin's first book publication issued in 1974, she conspicuously propounded a sexual-emancipatory outline that relied on the kind of contrarian insights, which Strauss had once considered in connection with

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<sup>82</sup> Having disregarded the views of Darwin and Hirschfeld on sexual difference, it is hardly surprising that Strauss also ignored the stance taken by American sexologist Alfred Kinsey (1894-1956) on the matter. The critique of the man/woman disjunction Kinsey advanced in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Kinsey, 1948) and in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Kinsey, 1953), was forecast by an address he delivered as president of the Indiana University chapter of *Phi Beta Kappa* in 1939. The text was posthumously published by Cornelia Christenson under the title "Individuals" at the opening of her Kinsey biography (Kinsey, 1971), and is generally regarded as the initial exposition of his "sexual philosophy" (Gathorne-Hardy, 1999, p. 152). As Christenson underlines,

this brief statement, written when he had spent twenty years studying gall wasps and was just embarking on the study of sex, epitomizes the philosophy that underlay all of Kinsey's work. As a taxonomist he was impressed by the limitless variety of living creatures, whether gall wasps or human beings, and by the scientific and social import of recognizing their differences (Christenson, 1971, p. 3).

In the speech, Kinsey highlights the universal variability of life, remarking that the endless re-combinations of biologic characters in different individuals "swell the possibilities to something which is, for all essential purposes, *infinity*" (Kinsey, 1971, p. 5; emphasis added). On this premise, Kinsey goes on to assert: "The failure to recognize this *unlimited nonidentity* has, even in biology, vitiated much of our scientific work" (Kinsey, 1971, p. 5; emphasis added). Although the text does not mention explicitly the sexual variability of human beings, it is apparent that Kinsey's axioms concerning the "multiplicity of types which range continuously" (Kinsey, 1971, p. 8) are directly applicable in the domain of sexual taxonomy, thus disrupting the dichotomous classifications pervasive in sexological discourse. Toward the end of his address, Kinsey signally points out: "Scholarly thinking as well as the laymen's evaluation still needs to be tempered with the realization that individual variations shape into a continuous curve on which there are no sharp divisions between normal and abnormal, between right and wrong" (Kinsey, 1971, p. 9). For an analysis of Kinsey's views on sexual difference, see: Bauer, 2007; Bauer, 2008.

his exegesis of *Genesis* 1: 27, but later abandoned for the sake of complying with the *Law* embodied in the twin Western "codes" of morality.

42. The difference between Strauss and Dworkin as regards their approach of sexuality is not so much a generational issue, but rather a matter of philosophical orientation and intellectual consistency. Contrasting with Strauss' attempt to recover the pre-modern certainties encapsulated, for instance, in Arabo-Jewish scholasticism and its inherently patriarchal traits, Dworkin signals her strong sense of futurity already with the names of the two women she mentions in the dedication of *Woman Hating*: American fiction writer, feminist, Jewish non-Zionist and anti-war activist Grace Paley (1922-2007) and Emma Goldman (1869-1940), the great anarchist-political writer and women's rights theoretician born in Kaunas, a city belonging at the time to the Russian Empire's Kovno Governorate. Unwittingly belying Strauss' premise that *realiter* "there are only males and females" (Strauss, 2001, p. 127), Dworkin's "sexual-revolution philosophy" (Dworkin, 1983, p. 89) envisages not only the dismemberment of the "sex-class system" (Dworkin, 1983, p. 216) but also the consequent dissolution of the sexual dichotomy as its neuralgic center (see Dworkin, 1983, p. 219). In support of her deconstructive design, Dworkin underscores in *Our Blood*—her 1976 collection of essays—the "crucial distinction [...] between truth and reality" (Dworkin, 1976, p. 109). Since, according to Dworkin, "reality" is "whatever premises social and cultural institutions are built on," it soon morphs into a privileged instrumentality deployed by the powerful to sanction "their right to domination over the powerless" (Dworkin, 1976, p. 109). On this assumption, "reality" becomes "a function of politics in general and sexual politics in particular," which parades for most as the unquestionably self-evident. By distracting from possible alternatives to its self-perpetuation, "reality" contributes to leaving power unchallenged. In direct contrast to the phantasmal mask of the factual, Dworkin posits that "truth is absolute in that it does exist and can be found" (Dworkin, 1976, p. 109).



43. The young Andrea Dworkin sought "to discern another ontology" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 175) that would prompt a "radical new formulation of the nature of human sexuality" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 183) and counter "sexism, that is, polar sex definitions of male and female, man and woman" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 153). Her core commitment was thus "to ending the system of oppression called patriarchy; to ending the male sexual model itself" (Dworkin, 1976, p. 12). With an eye to unmasking "man" and "woman" as "fictions, caricatures, cultural constructs" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 174),<sup>83</sup> Dworkin turned to biology as a provider of epistemic evidence against the presumed givenness of sexual binarity (Dworkin, 1974, p. 175). The radical change of sexual perspective Dworkin advocated was obviously not intended to cancel sexual difference as such, but, on the contrary, to sharpen the perception of the endless diversity of sexual forms it encompasses (see Dworkin, 1974, p. 175). To prove her point, Dworkin adduces in fourteen numbered paragraphs science-based evidence taken from different fields of research. Arguably one of the most thought-provoking portions of *Woman Hating*, these paragraphs offer biological support for the historical, psychological, sociological, and mythological theses Dworkin advances in the preceding chapters of the book. In concluding the discussion of her anatomical and physiological premises, Dworkin sums up the kernel of her claims in a sentence set in italics: "*We are, clearly, a multi-sexed species.*" Since the multi-sexuality Dworkin conceptualizes spreads "*along a vast fluid continuum*" of "*not*

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<sup>83</sup> Although Dworkin does not seem to have been familiar with the work of Magnus Hirschfeld, her core premise concerning the fictionality of "man" and "woman" evinces an astounding convergence with one of the epistemic pillars of the sexologist's *sexuelle Zwischenstufenlehre*:

Es ist immer mißlich, Qualitätsgegensätze zwischen Mann und Frau anzunehmen; man darf dabei nicht vergessen, daß es im wirklichen Sinn weder Mann noch Frau gibt, jeder Mensch vielmehr eine Mischung von Mann und Weib ist. (Hirschfeld, 1913, p. 4; see Bauer, 2003b November). [It is always unfortunate to presuppose qualitative oppositions between man and woman. In this regard, one should not forget that, in a real sense, neither man nor woman exists. Rather, every human being is a mixture of man and woman.]

*discrete*" male and female elements (Dworkin, 1974, p. 183; emphasis in original), the proper overcoming of patriarchy's man/woman hiatus takes the form of a potentially infinite template of sexual differentiation.

44. Since instead of positing a combinatory of discontinuous sexual elements, Dworkin postulates an Heraclitean fluidity of sexualities, the sexed individual preserves his/her/its uniqueness by renouncing the comforts of shared categorical identities. Dworkin's deconstructive line of argument thus begins by focusing on the increasing complexification of the biological sexual strata with the aim of showing how each of them contributes to undoing the regnant dichotomous scheme of sexuality. Assuming in general that vestiges of the opposite sex are present in each of the presumed binary sexes (1), Dworkin points out that both sexes have the same external genitalia until the seventh week of development (2), and that the gonads contain a varying amount of opposite-sex tissue throughout the individual's life (3). Moreover, Dworkin posits that the alleged male/female disjunction contradicts the ascertainable fact that "[g]onadal sex and chromosomal sex can be in direct contradiction" (4) (Dworkin, 1974, p. 177; emphasis in original) and that the existing chromosomal sex alternatives surpass by far the prevalent XX/XY formations (5). As further evidence against clear-cut distinctions between "man" and "woman," Dworkin highlights the divergence in some individuals between the gonadal and the secondary sexual characteristics (6); the perplexing fact that "man and woman both produce male and female hormones" (7) (Dworkin, 1974, p. 177); and the occurrence of individual cases in which the body transforms male hormones into female hormones, or vice versa (8). In a more conjectural tone, Dworkin goes on to detail that "it is now thought that the male hormone determines the sex drive in both men and women" (9) (Dworkin, 1974, p. 177) and that the "female hormone (progesterone) can have a masculinizing effect" (10) (Dworkin, 1974, p. 178).

45. Dworkin's three-page summary of well-known research results from almost half a century ago regarding the

individual's male/female fluidity is certainly in need of revision and actualization. Nevertheless, it offers sufficient support for her overarching contention that the complexity of the individual's sexuality escapes, on principle, finite schemes of categorial subsumption. Even if correctives and amplifications may be deemed necessary in the details of Dworkin's elaborations, her overall reconceptualization of sexual difference provides a solid basis for her ambitious sexual emancipatory agenda. In this regard, it is apposite to note that, unintendedly, Dworkin outlined a comprehensive undertaking that accorded well with Magnus Hirschfeld's life motto: *per scientiam ad justitiam* (see Bauer, 1998; Bauer, 2002b, December). Like Hirschfeld, Dworkin recurred to a biological (and not merely psychological or linguistic) anchorage of her endeavors that thwarts the conflation of sex and gender (or their interchangeability). Ignoring her explicit elaborations in this regard, however, authors like American historian and gay rights activist Martin Duberman appear to blend or confound *sex* and *gender* in their exposition of Dworkin's sexual thought. Thus, in his 2020 volume *Andrea Dworkin. The Feminist as Revolutionary*, Duberman contends at first that "Andrea drew on an impressive variety of historical and scientific studies to justify her conclusion that there are not merely *two* genders." In support of his claim, Duberman adduces Dworkin's already cited phrase: "We are a multi-sexed species" (Duberman, 2020, p. 71). In this connection, it should be kept in mind, however, that contrasting with Duberman's line of argument, Dworkin never advocated a diversification of genders, but rather "an end to a gender system that I think is specious" (quoted in Duberman, 2020, p. 148). In a letter to a friend cited but by Duberman, Dworkin expressed more explicitly her outright rejection of the *gender* concept: "I don't believe in gender [...]. I don't believe that gender exists outside a social system of oppression" (quoted in Duberman, 2020, p. 160).<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Against parochial voices seeking to decry Dworkin's deconstructive pursuits as a case of post-modern eccentricity, it should be recalled that Dworkin dismantled gender and the sexual disjunction (along with its finite supplementations) in order to create an ambit for uniquely sexed

46. Interestingly enough, Duberman acknowledged at one point that "Andrea [...] saw gender as socially constructed" (Duberman, 2020, p. 153). Her view on the issue, however, did not imply legitimating gender as a *reality* construct parallel to and independent of sexual *truth*, but rather rejecting it as a fiction operative only within "a social system of oppression." As already suggested, Dworkin distinguished early on between (alienatory) reality and (liberatory) truth. Accordingly, the overarching consistency of her sexual thought hinged on the unequivocal dismissal of the oppressive fictionality of the gender construct for the sake of asserting the attainable truth of sex. From this perspective, the untruth of the gender distinction between man and woman contrasts with the passage from *Woman Hating* concerning the sexual truth of humanity as "*a multi-sexed species which has its sexuality spread along a vast fluid continuum where the elements called male and female are not discrete*" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 183; emphasis in original). Resonating with her consequent reconceptualization of "the nature of human sexuality" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 183), Dworkin makes no reference in this or comparable passus to a *multi-gendered species*, to *gender binarity* or its possible supplementations. On principle, Dworkin distanced herself from the parlance of a socially constructed *gender*, for it could only aspire to be "real" in the sense of mirroring society's alienatory power constellations, but certainly not "true" in the sense of a critical path toward their termination. Against the backdrop of her clear design to end the "gender system," Duberman appears to miss the point, when he remarks that for Dworkin "there are not merely *two* genders" (Duberman, 2020, p. 71; emphasis in original). Lacking truth, the number of genders is lastly an irrelevancy. By contrast, Dworkin's actual stance implies that the *individual sexes* are potentially infinite in number, as they

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individuals within the "vast fluid continuum" of sexualities. Therewith, Dworkin was unintendedly revitalizing the postulation of sexual individuality at the core of Magnus Hirschfeld's *Geschlechtskunde*: "Hinsichtlich der Sexualkonstitution [hat] jeder Mensch **seine Natur** und **sein Gesetz**" (Hirschfeld, 1923, p. 23; bold in original; see Bauer, 2002a, December) [As regards the sexual constitution, every human being has **his** [own] **nature** and **his** [own] **law**.]

result from unique combinatories of non-discrete, male/female elements that counter the subsumption of sexed individuals under shared categorial identities.

47. In light of the preceding remarks, it is apparent that Dworkin not only left behind the notion of gender as a societal "reality" construction, but also debunked the conception of binary sexuality and its possible finite accretions. What Dworkinian "androgyny" supplants is not only the "traditional gender binary" (Duberman, 2020, p. 245), but the presumptuous pretension of sexual binarity to be a given of nature. On this assumption, androgyny does not emerge as an ideal, prospective complement of current sexual taxologies, but as the site of the concrete recovery, *hic et nunc*, of sexuality's de-hypostatized nature. Accordingly, Dworkin set her premise regarding multi-sexuality in the service of a sexual-emancipatory program based on the idea that "all forms of human interaction [...] must be part of the fabric of human life, accepted into the lexicon of human possibility, integrated into the forms of human community" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 183). From Dworkin's perspective, sexual liberation takes place in the tensional ambit between the historically determined, alienatory present and the incremental actualization of the emancipatory potentialities that inhere in human sexuality from the outset of its evolutionary history. Correspondingly, Dworkin articulates the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem* of her conception of sex in a paratactic passage informed by her Jewish-prophetic vision of history as the site of self-implemented deliverance: "Sex as the power dynamic between men and women, its primary form masochism, is what we know now. Sex as community between humans, our shared humanity, is the world we must build" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 183). It is as part of the world-historical transition from endured destiny to ethical self-realization that Dworkin's sexual deconstructions reveal themselves as liberatory. As an essential aspect of her overall emancipatory pursuits, Dworkin worked together with Law professor and feminist activist

Catharine A. MacKinnon with the aim of dismantling the underworld of pornography and prostitution.<sup>85</sup>

48. Toward the end of *Woman Hating*, Dworkin sums up her liberational concerns in form of a question: "What kind of sexual identity and relation will be the substance of that [ethically inspired] community [to come]?" (Dworkin, 1974, pp. 183-184). The short answer to the query reads: "Androgyny," which, not by chance, is the heading of the concluding part of Dworkin's volume. Furthermore, Dworkin advances in its last chapter a forthright feminist critique of "heterosexuality as the ritualized behavior built on polar role definitions" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 184). In this context, Dworkin underscores that in the present-day, male dominated environment intercourse with men means for women "remaining the victim, [...] acting out the female role, incorporating the masochism, self hatred, and passivity which are central to it" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 184). With a view on the "common humanity" shared by men and women, Dworkin maintains that "[u]nambiguous conventional

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<sup>85</sup> Between 1974 and 2002, Dworkin published twelve fiction and non-fiction books, including the 1981 volume *Pornography. Men Possessing Women*, which was dedicated to her life companion and male feminist John Stoltenberg (Dworkin, 1989, p. vi). In 1985, the first results of Dworkin's collaborative work with Catharine A. MacKinnon (born 1946) was published under the title *The Reasons Why: Essays on the New Civil Rights Law Recognizing Pornography as Sex Discrimination* (Dworkin & MacKinnon, 1985). In 1988, both writers co-authored a second volume: *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality* (Dworkin & MacKinnon, 1988). Radical feminist, legal scholar, and activist MacKinnon, who eventually became a Harvard Visiting Professor of Law, coedited with Dworkin in 1997 *In Harm's Way: The Pornography Civil Rights Hearings* (MacKinnon & Dworkin, 1997). As will be seen in connection with Camille Paglia's and Naomi Wolf's assessment of Dworkin's work, the perception of her public persona and the reception of her writings was closely associated with the principled critique of pornography and prostitution she and MacKinnon had developed. Their research on legal and societal policies concerning sexually exploited women drew on Dworkin's feminist groundwork toward an anti-patriarchal reconceptualization of sexual difference. In this context, it suffices to underscore that, for Dworkin, prostitution and pornography were the most conspicuous and perverse manifestations of the masculinist *proton pseudos* that hides behind the hierarchization of the finitized sexes.

heterosexual behavior" constitutes "the worst betrayal" of the commonality at stake. Since this kind of contention along with her critical stance on pornography and prostitution soon prompted infuriated reactions in both masculinist and feminist circles,<sup>86</sup> Dworkin underscored that she was not suggesting

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<sup>86</sup> Among the numerous vilifiers of Andrea Dworkin, the most media effective was arguably Camille Paglia (born 1947), the author of the 1990 bestseller *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (Paglia, 1990; see Bauer, 1994). Two years later, *Playboy* published Paglia's piece "The Return of Carry Nation: Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin," suggesting a parallel between Caroline Amelia Nation (1846-1911), a radical member of the Temperance Movement, and the purportedly anti-sex and anti-free speech crusaders reacting against the 1968 revolutionaries (see Paglia, 2018, p. 157). The *Playboy* article was eventually reissued in Paglia's essay collections *Vamps & Tramps* (1994) and *Free Women. Free Men* (2017). Aside from publishing her text on Dworkin and MacKinnon thrice over a period of two and a half decades, Paglia reiterated her views on them in an interview of 2015:

The anti-porn crusader Andrea Dworkin (who died a decade ago) was a rabid fanatic, a self-destructive woman so consumed by her hatred of men that she tottered on the edge of psychosis. Dworkin and her puritanical henchman Catherine MacKinnon (born into wealth and privilege) were extremely powerful in the United States for a long time, culminating in the major media canonization of MacKinnon in the 1991 *New York Times Magazine* cover story (Paglia, 2017, p. 272).

As a self-declared "pornographer" (Paglia, 1994, p. 107) and champion of a "pagan vision" (Paglia, 1994, p. 107), Paglia waged war against Dworkin and MacKinnon with all rhetorical means at her disposal. Her verbose vituperations included calling them "victim-mongers, ambulance chasers, atrocity addicts" (Paglia, 1994, p. 110). Specifically targeting Dworkin, Paglia decries her "glib Auschwitz metaphors" (Paglia, 1994, p. 111) and "self-analytic, self lacerating Jewishness" (Paglia, 1994, p. 109). Her insults and denigrations, however, hardly distract from her lack of rigor in dealing with the philosophical reasoning behind Dworkin's political activities and interventions. Paglia is meticulous in avoiding any discussion of Dworkin's theoretical positions and emancipatory design, alleging that they belong to a brand of feminism that has already been defeated. While admitting that in the past "Dworkin was treated as a deity by many women journalists and writers," Paglia reminisced about these historical details in order to frame her self-congratulatory contention that the wing of feminism she belonged to had finally achieved the "momentum" (Paglia, 2017, p. 127). It was certainly within Paglia's rights to display her anti-Jewish resentments as blatantly as she deemed apposite. Her exuberant rhetoric, however, was



"that 'men' and 'women' should not fuck" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 184), but that "fucking" must be cleansed from its inherited patriarchalism.<sup>87</sup> To this end, she proposed an agenda of sexual de-hierarchization targeting the immemorial roles which subordinating men and subordinated women gladly uphold as the price to be paid for maintaining the apparent stability of their individual lives and inherited lifestyles.<sup>88</sup> Against this

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ill-suited to divert from the groundlessness of her undialectical conception of "biological sex differences" (Paglia, 2017, p. 145) and proto-machist plea to "let men be men" (Paglia, 2017, p. 90). In this regard, Paglia's stance is at the antipodes of Dworkin's liberatory dissolution of sexual-taxological hypostases out of the spirit of "ethical Judaism."

<sup>87</sup> The term *fucking*, which is generally considered vulgar and obscene, acquires in Dworkin's terminological usage nuances of its own. In this context, the concept is not meant as a synonym for *copulating* and is rarely grammaticalized or used as an intensifier (see Goldenson & Anderson, 1994, p. 94). As the phrase "androgynous fucking" suggests, Dworkin does not lay the semantic weight of *fucking* on coital penetration, but rather on a form of sexual intercourse enhancing the sexualization/erotization of the whole body in correspondence with John Stoltenberg's depiction of the sexual practice of *frottage* (see §§ 50-51 in the present study).

<sup>88</sup> In 1990, the year Paglia issued *Sexual Personae*, feminist writer Naomi Wolf (born 1962) published her own bestseller under the title *The Beauty Myth*. While Paglia first focused on Dworkin in a critical piece of 1992, Wolf mentions Dworkin in the chapter on "Violence" of her 1990 volume. When dealing in this context with Chinese and Christian-medieval misogyny, Wolf remits to Dworkin's *Woman Hating* (Wolf, 1991, pp. 243; 254-255), a volume that had been published sixteen years earlier. In her 1993 volume *Fire with Fire*, Wolf multiplied her direct and indirect citations of Dworkin, whom she considered as one of contemporary feminism's "profound theorists" (Wolf, 1993, p. 143). Furthermore, while praising Dworkin's *Intercourse* as "troubling and groundbreaking" (Wolf, 1993, p. 122), Wolf characterized Dworkin's and MacKinnon's rebuttal of the male claim to societal superiority as "fundamental" (Wolf, 1993, p. 180). Wolf's outspoken commendation of Dworkin work, however, was paired with a critique of her role in the revival of the so-called "victim feminism," whose roots go back to early nineteenth century Quakerism and its concern for abolition and women rights. Wolf rejects Dworkin's and MacKinnon's "vision of overweening male oppression and female lack of choice" (Wolf, 1993, p. 143), but passes over in silence Dworkin's paeon of androgynous love as the path toward surpassing feminism's historical shortcomings. In her 1999 introduction to "The New Jerusalem for Women," Jennifer Wallace followed in Wolf's steps, ignoring Dworkin's proleptic vision of androgyny's victory over patriarchy and its attendant feminist defeatisms (Wallace, 1999, pp. 90-91). For anyone who has parsed *Woman Hating* to



backdrop, Dworkin's new "*androgynous fucking*" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 184) enabled androgyny to become not an irenic complement to the male/female disjunction, but a critical instrumentality meant to dismantle the axiology behind the claims of patriarchal taxologies.

49. There being neither *men* nor *women*, androgyny renegotiates the relation between sexed individuals that have freed themselves from the obsessional topos of penile plenitude and vaginal void. Consequently, Dworkin's re-conceptualization of human genital interaction de-potentiates the compulsive drive toward phallic penetration or being phallically penetrated for the sake of the total bodily involvement in the sexual practice of frottage, which includes, as one of its aspects, the panoply of penile/clitoral varieties of tactile interplay. Despite the seeming innocuousness of Dworkin's approach of *fucking*, it effectively implies *destroying* (Dworkin's word) the present-day culture of male domination that has been building up since the beginnings of historical time (see Dworkin, 1997, p. 149). The dismantling of phallocentricity that Dworkin envisages, however, is not brought about by merely spurning the *co-ire* of male (penile) and female (clitoral) phalluses. While this rejection would possibly contribute to undermining the miseries of patriarchal penetration, it stops short of acknowledging that *penis* and *clitoris* as concepts are just inadequate heuristic approaches to what are the ever-varying modulations of the coital organs within the fluid continuum of sexuality. Drawing attention to this anatomical and physiological fluidity was essential to Dworkin's line of argument, for it necessitates re-conceptualizing *fucking*/intercourse as an intimate coming together of sexed individuals who are, in the truest sense of the word, neither men nor woman, and for this reason, incapable of configuring male/female, male/male, or female/female couples. Despite the heading "Heterosexuality

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the end and is familiar with *Ice and Fire* and the short story "the wild cherries"—both preceding for years the publication of *Fire with Fire*—, Wolf's neglect of androgyny as the clef de voûte of Dworkinian thought is nothing less than disconcerting.

and Homosexuality" included in the final chapter of *Woman Hating*, Dworkin lastly debunks both concepts in the name of the biological continuum of sexuality "where the elements called male and female are not discrete" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 183).

50. Given that the issue of androgyny constitutes the argumentative culmination point of *Woman Hating*, it proved to be especially significant that Dworkin gave a copy of the book to John Stoltenberg, a recent young acquaintance, shortly after its publication. At the time an emerging writer, Stoltenberg played no role in developing the ideas of the book, which Dworkin had originally planned as a collaborative project with fellow American expatriate Ricki Abrams as they were living in Amsterdam in the early 1970s. However, Stoltenberg's eventual commitment to spend the rest of his life with Dworkin was closely related to his wholeheartedly adoption of the radical ideas expressed in the volume. Accordingly, their erotic/sexual encounters were informed from the start by the conception of androgyny that Dworkin had set forth and Stoltenberg embraced. The analysis of Dworkin's creative processing of their intimacy and the way Stoltenberg's dissident sexual orientation contributed to its configuration has been thankfully facilitated by the archival materials presented by Martin Duberman in his recent Dworkin biography. In this context, he mentions that Stoltenberg once used the term "compassionate companions" to describe his love life with Dworkin. Furthermore, Duberman reports that "their relationship *was* intermittently sexual—that is, they 'made love' but always without intercourse" (Duberman, 2020, p. 75; emphasis in original). To underpin his account, Duberman quotes from Stoltenberg's recollections:

I remember lying on top of her [...] rubbing the base of my semi-erect penis against her pubic mound, rubbing my penis against her clitoris, rubbing our whole bodies together, kissing everywhere, sweating, breathing heavily, writhing, moaning, the cumming and cumming and holding each other tight ... I didn't yet know that

there was a word for this: *frottage* (quoted in Duberman, 2020, p. 75; emphasis in original).<sup>89</sup>

51. *Frottage* was the sexual practice that reconciled Dworkin's personal rejection of penile penetration and Stoltenberg's distaste for performing the active role in coitus. A self-declared homosexual with a clear preference for being anally penetrated (see Duberman, 2020, p. 75), Stoltenberg declared in his 1994 piece "Living with Andrea Dworkin" that "they have fallen in love and that life apart is simply unthinkable." He then went on to "state only the simplest facts publicly: yes, Andrea and I live together and love each other and we are each other's life partner, and yes we are both out" (Stoltenberg, 1994). By openly owning their lesbian and gay dissidence, while remaining a love couple, Dworkin and Stoltenberg were harmonizing their lasting commitment to each other with their conception of an "androgynous community" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 191), the emancipatory alternative to the monogamy of the patriarchal family. A radical male feminist, Stoltenberg was the real-life man behind the thalassic lover of Dworkin's 1986 novel *Ice and Fire*, whose relation to the protagonist was placed under the sign of dismantling the sexual asymmetry that structures the man/woman combinatory in patriarchal settings. As regards her relation to Stoltenberg, Dworkin wrote in *Life and Death*: "We share the politics of radical feminism and a commitment to destroying male dominance and gender itself" (Dworkin, 1997, p. 33-34). Considering this backdrop, Dworkin's literary evocations of their sexual *frottage* betoken a praxis of non-penetrative intercourse that explores sources of shared sexual pleasure that exceed the limits of the sexual organs and their sub-abdominal prolongations. Envisaging a comprehensive eroticization of the androgynous body, Dworkin acknowledged

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<sup>89</sup> According to Duberman, this passage relates to "the early days" (Duberman, 2020, p. 75) of the relationship between Stoltenberg and Dworkin, which was the period following the publication of *Woman Hating* in 1974. Contrasting with the way Stoltenberg contextualizes and assesses the term, the 1994 edition of *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Sex* still considered *frottage* a "sexual disorder or paraphilia" (Goldenson & Anderson, 1994, p. 94).

that homosexuality can be a conduit toward androgyny because of its capacity to undermine the exclusiveness of the male/female combinatory. However, since this capacity does not necessarily imply overcoming homosexual phallocentrism, Dworkin carefully cautions: "Too often homosexual relation transgresses gender imperatives without transforming them" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 185).

52. Seen against the backdrop of Dworkin's *Woman Hating*, the sexual rubbing between her and Stoltenberg emerges as a form of intercourse involving not a man and a woman, but androgynes. The bodily intimacy at stake is echoed in a passage of *Ice and Fire* in which the protagonist "invited [...] in" the young lover (Dworkin, 1986, p. 122) and he entered her "privacy, never offending it" (Dworkin, 1986, p. 123). This *entering* without *penetrating*, was for Dworkin the only way to achieve sexual fulfilment without belying the core feminist premise of radical reciprocity between so-called *men* and so-called *women*. Given that the real-life *fuck* Dworkin evokes was not focused on ejaculation and the ensuing (albeit mostly implicit) teleology of reproduction, the coitants were able to prolong orgasmic pleasure at will. Since, on these assumptions, the male lover approaches the female capacity of repeatedly climaxing, while the female lover recovers the culturally truncated, penile sensitivity of her clitoris, Dworkin's narrative of androgynous intercourse (along with Stoltenberg's corroborative biographical depictions) was meant as a first step toward the dismantlement of the patriarchal *fictum* concerning the existence of two, and only two, sexes. Moreover, the contrarian *fuck* between the two lovers of *Ice and Fire* exemplifies "the free-flow of natural androgynous eroticism" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 189), which prolongs their awareness of the thalassic continuum:

We were like women together on that narrow piece of foam rubber, and he, astonished by the sensuality of it, ongoing, the thick sweetness of it, came so many times, like a woman: and me too: over and over: like one massive, perpetually knotted and moving creature, the same intense orgasms; no drifting separateness of the mind or

fragmented fetishizing of the body: instead a magnificent cresting, the way a wave rises to a height pushing forward and pulls back underneath itself toward drowning at the same time: one wave lasting forever, rising, pulling, drowning, dying. All in the same movement; or a wave in an ocean of waves covering nearly all the earth, immense (Dworkin, 1986, pp. 122-123).

53. Although *Ice and Fire* does not reveal the name or identity of the *invited* lover, he clearly emerges as the healing antithesis of the man the narrator/protagonist had married and divorced before beginning to work on *Woman Hating*. Contrasting with the marital rape and violence that Dworkin's impersonation in the novel experienced in the past, her present is dominated by her intimacy with the "beautiful boy": "My privacy included him" (Dworkin, 1986, p. 122). Thus, she not only declares that "My lost brother and I became lovers forever," but points to the puzzling uniqueness of their being together: "I need never touch him again " (Dworkin, 1986, p. 123). Notwithstanding the closeness of their encounter, the narrative voice insists that it should not be mistaken for a form of fusional love. Beyond pointing to the couple's principled rejection of coital penetration, the novel underscores the protagonist's sense of privacy when depicting her highest existential priority: "I put solitude first, before him" (Dworkin, 1986, p. 124). Assuming that this hierarchization is the indispensable condition for realizing her writerly vocation, the narrator leaves no doubt about its exacting consequences:

He [the lover of her life] is for human times. But writing is cold and alone. It makes you monstrous, hard, icy, colder and more barren, more ruthless, than the Arctic Sea. [...] The glacier moves slowly over the fertile plain, killing. Everything around you begins to die (Dworkin, 1986, p. 125).

At this point, it should be reminded that the describable but non-categorizable erotic closeness of protagonist and lover is one between androgynes, united in preserving the solitude the protagonist needs to become the writer she aspired to be since early childhood.

54. The sense of existential plenitude attained by Dworkin and Stoltenberg during sexual frottage as well as by their alter egos in *Ice and Fire* was reason enough to "épater the fuckers," as Dworkin's 1991 novel *Mercy* puts it (Dworkin, 1991, pp. 235-236). The intensity of the encounter "in that sea so awesome in its density and splendor" (Dworkin, 1986, p. 123) that *Ice and Fire* evokes, left way behind the "namby-pamby silliness of thighs that had to open: narrow pleasure with no mystery, no subtlety, no subtext" (Dworkin, 1991, p. 122). Having exposed a comparable shallowness in the ideological promises of the 1968 revolutionaries, Dworkin decided to pursue her own path toward the reversal of the societal system. To this end, she relied on the prosaic realities of evolutionary biology and their (for most surely unexpected) convergence with the Biblical/Mishnaic/Kabbalistic views on the androgyny of the First Man.<sup>90</sup> Contravening the apocalyptic or eschatological exaltations of *man* in Western religious traditions and their revolutionary offshoots, Dworkin's creation-oriented gaze dwells on the Adamic "man/woman" as the paradigmatic anthropological anchorage of the post-patriarchal commonality that enhances human sexual diversity. Signally, this commonality is not something revealed at the end of time, for it has been accessible since the beginning of Creation and can be actualized "here and now, inch by inch"

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<sup>90</sup> Like many young intellectuals of her generation, Dworkin was surely aware that Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) and other scholars close to the psychoanalytical movement had sought to make accessible the history of the Kabbalistic and alchemical conception of androgyny/hermaphroditism to a broader readership before the beginning of World War II. Thus, in his *Terry Lectures* of 1935 at Yale University, which were published under the title *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, Jung provided indispensable historical and methodical tools for approaching the matter (Jung, 1995b, pp. 46-47, 72, 81, 110, 121; see Jung, 1995a, pp. 145-227 [Chapter: "Adam und Eva"]). In this context, it should be reminded that the ambisexuality of the Adam Kadmon in the Kabbalistic sapiential tradition is a token of his pristine creatural condition, not an index of a deficient or nosological status. On the iconography of the Adam Kadmon and the Hermaphrodite in the alchemical tradition, see Aurnhammer, 1986; Jung, Franz, Henderson, Jacobi, and Jaffé, 1988, pp. 30-31, 71, 82, 200, 203; Roob, 1996, pp. 165-166, 168, 315, 457, 460, 462, 550, 672-673.

(Dworkin, 1974, p. 193). While relentlessly critiquing the fictional hypostases of *men* and *women*, Dworkin acknowledged their societal "reality" as a mask of their ontic "untruth."<sup>91</sup> Consequently, Dworkin posited a provisional sexual tripartition consisting of "women, men, and that emerging majority, the rest of us" (Dworkin, 1975, p. 154), whereby this "rest" is constituted by the growing number of self-conscious not-men and not-women who resist the phantasmagoric sexual hiatus in the name of the sexually non-categorizable, uniquely modulated androgynous individual. Needless to say, the sexual freedom of this thriving "rest" does not exclude the desire for reproductive options: Dworkin's "androgynous community" embraces children (Dworkin, 1974, pp. 191-192).

55. Since womanhood in Dworkin's diction is associated with its subordination to the overarching patriarchal design of culture, the emancipated "female" recovers her historically erased individuality by reclaiming and affirming the specific nuance of her androgyny. This is the personal path pursued by Bertha Schneider, the heroine of Dworkin's "the wild cherries of lust (for Osiris)," the sixth short story included in *The New Womans Broken Heart* (1980). Indebted to Kafka's narrative style, the piece begins with an unheard-of metamorphosis: "bertha schneider had once been a woman and was now an androgyne" (Dworkin, 1980, p. 25). Waiving any etiological considerations, the narrative voice in the story suffices itself with ascertaining the transformation Bertha had undergone by contrasting her past female condition with the sexual/gender traits that define her present. As a woman, Bertha "had lain for 8 years on her back with her legs open as the multitudes passed by leaving gifts of sperm and spit" (Dworkin, 1980, p. 25). Consequent to her time as a prostitute,

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<sup>91</sup> It is not amiss to remind in this connection that Dworkin had no illusions about the time it will take to bring about the termination of patriarchy. Her brief text of 1996 titled "A New Jerusalem for Women" closes with a sobering prospective: "Patriarchy is dying a slow, slow death; but patriarchal power still tyrannizes women in households and in brothels. I expect to see deeper and more massive resistance from women in the next century, especially in the Third World" (Dworkin, 1999, p. 94).

which echoes Dworkin's own life before her calamitous marriage in Amsterdam (Dworkin, 1997, p. 22; Dworkin, 2002, pp. 162, 177, 196),<sup>92</sup> Bertha "passed two years of celibacy," when she fucked "in much the way vegetarians eat hamburgers—sometimes and not proudly" (Dworkin, 1980, p. 25). The vaguely autobiographical story briefly mentions Bertha's mental morphing, while dwelling on details concerning the transformation of her breasts, belly, nose, hair, hands and mouth. Having renounced prostitution without consistently embracing chastity, Bertha will eventually emerge as a full-fledged pansexual androgyne, whose corporeal ambiguity is the reverse of a transient sexual stage vowed to be rendered conform to the hegemonical paradigm of male/female dimorphism. By repudiating any attempt to fake sexual univocity, Bertha regains the body's ambisexual marks that patriarchal history has generally curbed and repressed for the sake of consolidating the teleology of Oedipal heterosexuality.

56. Bertha's post-prostitutional and post-mostly-chaste phase of her life is defined by a sexual praxis that surpasses the vulgar imaginings of mere "fuckers." Her androgynous sexuality is framed by the same erotic gratuity that pervades the encounter between the narrator and the "beautiful boy" in *Ice and Fire* (Dworkin, 1986, p. 122). Like the thalassic passages in the novel, "the wild cherries" spells out a visionary sexual stance incompatible with the mercantilism of prostitution and pornography that permeates present-day culture.<sup>93</sup> The scope of Dworkin's erotic grasp of the

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<sup>92</sup> Dworkin's critical stance on prostitution was informed by her lived experience of what she termed "the brothel model" and its ramifications (Dworkin, 1983, 177-178). Never forgetful that she had once been part of the dehumanizing world of prostitution, it eventually became a leitmotif of her oeuvre. In *Heartbreak*, which was the last book she published in her lifetime, Dworkin admits without reservations: "as a woman, I had prostituted" (Dworkin, 2002, p. 177). She then goes on to refer to "a few formerly prostituted women, including myself" (Dworkin, 2002, p. 196).

<sup>93</sup> Dworkin at times quotes or offers variations of a dictum by American *homme de théâtre* Julian Beck (1925-1985) to the effect that "The journey to love is not romantic" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 192). On this assumption, the



androgynous body becomes patent when the authorial voice asserts as regards Bertha: "a finger on her belly was the instrument of ecstasy and a tongue brought on multiple orgasms that were as vast and as deep as the universe" (Dworkin, 1980, p. 26). The story's hint to the androgynous "nose" is even more significant, for it is a coded reference to the *clitoris*, as the following passage makes abundantly clear:

it [that is, the *nose* of not-woman Bertha] had grown and grown and grown. sometimes it hung, weak, limp, sweet, beautiful. [...] when it happened in the presence of other androgynes, she herself would touch and fondle it. limp or stiff, her nose would roll over arms and into armpits, explore ears [another code word!] that opened up like flowers, juicy and moist and yielding, [...] immerse itself into puddles of saliva under the tongue and the rich resonances of slick assholes, vibrate and heave, and finally come to rest on a nipple, touching it just barely. then, as bertha lay exhausted, her lover would touch her belly and so they would begin again and continue and replenish and deplete and invent, and then begin again (Dworkin, 1980, p. 26).

57. Given her erectile "nose" with a quasi-phallic function, Bertha appears masculinized, although she never becomes or aspires to become a *man* as the opposite of *woman* in the disjunctive sexual regime. The depiction of her perplexing sexual complexion resonates with a passage in *Mercy*, where

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lyricism that *Ice and Fire* and "the wild cherries" displays is not indicative of an "ersatz romanticism" but of "analytical insight scalpel-like in exposing the viscera of social oppression," as Dworkin formulates in her study on Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (Dworkin, 1988, p. 82). Once a victim of pimps and then a battered wife, Dworkin knew "that her life depends on never being taken in by romantic illusion or sexual hallucination" (Dworkin, 1988, p. 105). The androgynous love she praises is thus the critical counter-paradigm of the "metaphysics of women's subjugation" (Dworkin, 1988, p. 267) that subtends the social realities of prostitution and pornography. Both forms of dehumanization are "very closely related" (Dworkin, 1988, p. 148), for, as Dworkin argues, "[p]olitically, culturally, socially, sexually, and economically, rape and prostitution generated pornography; and pornography depends for its continued existence on the rape and prostitution of women" (Dworkin, 1988, p. 230).

Andrea's authorial voice makes clear that her given name means "manhood or courage" (Dworkin, 1991, p. 57), but then details: "I say I am Andrea but I am not manhood for which [...] I am glad, because they have gone to filth, they are maggots on this earth" (Dworkin, 1991, p. 307). Basically, once female, but now androgynous Bertha reclaims the masculinity of being a "not-cunt" not to become a "man," but someone who assumes the human condition of a radically individualized androgyne cognizant of the ontic vacuity behind the categories of *man* and *woman* (see Dworkin, 1986, p. 144). Against the backdrop that, in the "real" world, sex changes are the result of surgical correctives and medicinal treatments, Bertha dispenses with such procedures, since, in her view, there is in truth no change from one sex—male or female—to another, but only the *trans-figuration* of an allegedly "real" sex into its "true" *androgynous* negation. By renouncing to offer any causal explanation of her unusual metamorphosis, Bertha heightens the unreality of her previous societal femininity with the aim of conveying the ontic truth of her unique androgyny. On these assumptions, not-cunt Bertha echoes the creational אֱנָדְרוֹגִינוֹס of the Midrash (see Dworkin, 1974, p. 172), for her emergence is enabled by an act of critical subtraction that removes the male/female contraption dominating "real" societies and cultures in order to lay bare the original, sexually non-categorizable, "true" human being (see Bauer, 2021).

58. While Bertha transgresses womanhood to become an androgyne, the narrative voice in *Ice and Fire* closes the novel with the words: "I am a writer, not a woman" (see Dworkin, 1986, p. 144). For Dworkin, who had once claimed: "I'm an expert on me" (Dworkin, 1997, p. xiv), the individual who becomes an androgyne/writer deploys knowledge to dissolve without appeal the immemorial man/woman hiatus. From this perspective, Dworkin's signal contribution to the history of human self-emancipation is her grasp of androgyny as the "one road to freedom" (Dworkin, 1975, p. 154). It is not by chance that the writerly Jewess Dworkin dubbed the Prague Jew Franz Kafka as "my love" (Dworkin, 1986 p. 96), and on one occasion even dreamt of becoming a "she-Kafka"

(Dworkin, 2002, p. xiv). Given that the deranging figure of the androgyne revealing humanity's "true" sexual nature constitutes the thematic crux of Dworkin's work, it is only consistent that the author of *Die Verwandlung* (*The Metamorphosis*) advanced to be the most recognizable literary presence in her oeuvre. As the *clef de voûte* of Dworkin's theoretical pursuits, transmogrifying androgyny marks a historical cesura that terminates the validity accorded to binary sexuality as the foremost product of patriarchal alienation. Inveighing against the eschatological or metaphysical procrastination of the end of the sexual dichotomy, Dworkin declares the emancipatory urgency of its dismantlement in the immediate present. Resonating with this line of thought, Dworkin set as epigraph of the first part of *Intercourse*—a non-fiction book subsequent to the novel *Ice and Fire*—an apophthegmatic passus from the work of Franz Kafka: "Beyond a certain point there is no return. This point has to be reached" / "Von einem gewissen Punkt an gibt es keine Rückkehr mehr. Dieser Punkt ist zu erreichen" (Dworkin, 1987, p. 1; Kafka, 1976b, p. 30).

59. In her lifetime, Dworkin was often denigrated by an American chorus of supporters of pornography and prostitution, who depicted her as "a 'melodramatic, hysterical crank,' an unkempt, fat, hairy, ugly 'male-hater,' a 'feminist Nazi'" (Duberman, 2020, p. 287). Her foes had neither the interest nor the capacity to assess her groundbreaking reconceptualization of sexual difference as the epistemic basis of her liberational critique.<sup>94</sup> In this connection, it is also worth

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<sup>94</sup> Contrasting with the vociferous vituperations targeting Dworkin throughout her public life as a feminist writer and activist, a careful examination of her arguments suggests a very different kind of assessment. Thus, in a 1999 volume titled *Predictions*, which claims to "bring[] together the thoughts of thirty of the world's most distinguished minds" on the future (Griffiths, 1999, p. xiii), Andrea Dworkin is placed alongside theoreticians and thinkers such as Noam Chomsky, Francis Fukuyama and Steven Jay Gould. In the introduction to Dworkin's contribution titled "A New Jerusalem for Women," Jennifer Wallace characterizes *Women Hating* as "a passionate exposé of violence against women" (Wallace, 1999, p. 87),

noting that, although the number of scholars who have written with admiration on her life and work (Jenefsky & Russo, 1998; Robinson, 2008; Duberman, 2020) is not negligible, they all failed to acknowledge that her conception of sexual emancipation is grounded in what she once termed "ethical Judaism" (see, for instance, Dworkin, 2000, p. 297). Biographer Martin Duberman, for instance, who considered Dworkin's book *Scapegoat* (2000) to be "arguably her finest—or certainly among them" (Duberman, 2020, p. 249), left unmentioned that her treatment of the Jewish "logic of chosenness" as a "moral logic" (Dworkin, 2000, p. 118) was indebted to the work of Conservative Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg (1921-2006). Accordingly, a passage in *Scapegoat* consists in a collage composition of quotes from a volume co-authored by Hertzberg titled *Jews: The Essence and Character of a People*:

'Chosenness is the ever-present, and inescapable, discomfort caused by conscience'; 'It does not really matter who chose the Jews. What does matter is that they have this angel or demon, conscience or neurosis, always riding on their back'; 'We Jews know why we suffer. Society resents anyone who challenges its fundamental beliefs, behavior, and prejudices. The ruling class does not like to be told that morality overrules power. [...] The Jew, therefore, must stand up

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but without mentioning or suggesting that the final chapters of Dworkin's initial volume focus on the issue on androgyny. Not unlike Dworkin's twenty-first century biographers, Wallace fails to acknowledge that androgyny signals for Dworkin the overcoming of patriarchy and the sexual hiatus it creates and sanctions. While Wallace, in view of Dworkin's radically critical feminism, suggests that she "might be developing a more positive outlook" (Wallace, 1999, p. 91), her introductory piece passes over in silence that Dworkin had already offered a "positive" resolution of the world-historical impasse of binary sexuality not only in the last two chapters of *Woman Hating* on androgyny, but also in *Ice and Fire* and in the short story "the wild cherries of lust," which are basically literary renditions of her core theoretical insights on androgyny. While regarding Dworkin as one of the world's most distinguished minds in consideration of her radical feminism, the editor of *Predictions* would have given her assessment more philosophical depth by taking into account that Dworkin's new sexual ontology effectively *transfigured* seeming "men" and "women" into uniquely modulated androgynes.

for a society that is bound by human morality and speak truth to power' (Dworkin, 2000, p. 117; see Herzberg & Hirt-Manheimer, 1998, pp. 19, 284-285, 31).

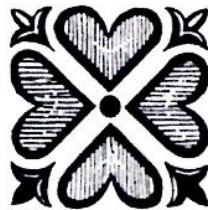
60. Dworkin's struggle against prostitution and pornography was part of her attempt to eradicate the cumulative misery of patriarchal history in order to create an ontic ambit for the humanity of androgynous lovers. Contrasting with the post-Christian, eschatological figuration of the hermaphrodite in the work of her older contemporary Norman O. Brown (1913-1902) (see Bauer, 2020b), Dworkin conceptualized androgyny within the historical temporality of Jewish-creational this-worldliness. Thus, having embraced the critique of sexual binarity implied in Rabbi Yirmiyah ben Elazar's teaching on the Adamic Androgyne, Dworkin readily included in her intellectual purview a signal result of contemporary genetic research, which she encapsulated in the sentence: "Each man is half woman: the X chromosome" (Dworkin, 2000, p. 197).<sup>95</sup> As to her design to dismantle finite schemes of sexual distribution, it hardly needs underscoring that it is rooted in the sapiential ethos of a dictum by Franz Kafka: "Das Negative zu tun, ist uns auferlegt; das Positive ist uns schon gegeben" (Kafka, 1976b, p. 32; see Bauer, 2003a; Bauer, 2003c, pp. 181-183).<sup>96</sup> Mindful of the servile obedience that Mosaic freedom seeks to undo, Dworkin cites toward the end of *Woman Hating* a longer passage from Kafka's *Der Prozeß* (*The Trial*), in which a priest tells "K." with reference to the pronouncements of the doorkeeper of the Law : "It is

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<sup>95</sup> For the sake of a broader historical contextualization, it should be noted that the year before the publication of Dworkin's *Scapegoat*, renowned British gynecologist Robert Winston (born 1940), who happens to be an Orthodox Jew and Member of the House of Lords, issued a book titled *The IVF Revolution*. An advocate of in-vitro fertilization, Winston not only argued that male pregnancies constitute a realistic possibility in the foreseeable future, but detailed the technical means needed to achieve that end. After pointing out that "effectively, our man could suffer all the risks of an advanced and most dangerous form of ectopic pregnancy" (Winston, 1999, p. 207), Winston went on to assert in all desirable clarity: "There is no doubt that men could get pregnant" (Winston, 1999, p. 207).

<sup>96</sup> "To perform the negative is what is required of us; the positive has already been given to us."

not necessary to accept everything as true, one must only accept it as necessary" / "man muß nicht alles für wahr halten, man muß es nur für notwendig halten" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 199; Kafka, 1976a, p. 188) As Dworkin intimates by quoting "K.", the priest's melancholy injunction implies the greatest imaginable perversion: "It turns lying into a universal principle" / "Die Lüge wird zur Weltordnung gemacht" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 199; Kafka, 1976a, p. 188). From this perspective, to accept without protest the alleged societal "reality" of dichotomic sexuality and its finite supplementations amounts to sanctioning a lie as the ordering rationale of the human world. It is not by chance that Leo Strauss, a champion for maintaining the stability of the sexual powers that be, not only neglected the critical import of *Genesis* 1:27 for contemporary conceptualizations of sexual difference, but also ignored outright Giordano Bruno's design to dismantle the sexual *bimembrum*. If given a chance, Strauss would have also scorned Andrea Dworkin's Heraclitean ambition "to discern another ontology" hospitable to androgyne disruptiveness. Accordant with Strauss' thoughtless vindication of the disjunctive sexual construct, the groundwork of his oeuvre gainsaid a truly insightful sentence included in the closing paragraph of *Natural Right and History*: "Naturalness and the flowering of individuality are the same" (Strauss, 1953, p. 323).



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