

**FEMINIST FREEDOM: A dialogue between the psychoanalytical insights of J. Lacan and N. Chodorow and classical Trinitarian theology.**

**Teresa Forcades i Vila**

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**ABSTRACT**

*I argue that our gender stereotypes confuse women's 'fear from solitude' with love, and men's 'fear of dependency' with freedom; I argue that 'femininity' and 'masculinity' are radically false conceived as lasting essences, but very much real conceived as two different types of infantile identity that can be welcomed as a subjective starting point from which to move ahead into ever greater personhood, into real freedom and love. The notion of freedom as irreducible individual responsibility for one's life and indeed for 'the wellbeing of all' is the only that can ground a coherent subjective position in the world. I have named such a notion 'feminist freedom' because it is only through the transcending of our gender identifications (both, feminine and masculine) that one can experience it. To advance my argument, I bring into dialogue the notion of subjectivation of J. Lacan as theorized by B. Fink, the sexuated process of individuation according to N. Chodorow and the notion of person developed by classical Trinitarian theology.*

**1. The feminist subject/person.**

Taking full individual responsibility for one's life is not an easy task, but one could argue that there is nothing more important nor more rewarding for a person, be it a woman or a man, to undertake. Taking individual responsibility for one's life has nothing to do with 'being individualistic' or even 'disregarding others'. It has to do with knowing that there is a duty out there waiting for me that is only and exclusively mine; it will never be fulfilled by anybody else; if I don't do it, it will remain forever undone. It consists in fully embracing my life as it is here and now and using whatever talents I have been given to push it forward in the direction that I see fit.

The patriarchal mindset assumes that men can do this better than women. According to the stereotypes of gender still prevalent in our XXI century societies, women in general are supposed to be more loving and dependent than men, and men in general are supposed to be freer and more independent than women. In reality, however, most women take care of themselves alone and most men still let a woman take care of them <sup>1</sup>. And yet, it seems to be also a fact that many women view themselves as more loving than the men they love, and that many men view themselves as freer than the women they love. With regard to gender expectations, most women and most men seem to experience problems between fulfillment and reality <sup>2</sup>. In this paper I will argue that our gender stereotypes confuse women's 'fear from solitude' with *love*, and men's 'fear of dependency' with *freedom*; I will argue that 'femininity' and 'masculinity' are radically false conceived as lasting essences, but very much real conceived as two different types of infantile identity that can be welcomed as a subjective starting point from which to move ahead into ever greater personhood, into *real* freedom and love.

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Chodorow, among many other sociologists, has pointed out that: *What is also often hidden, in generalizations about the family as an emotional refuge, is that in the family as it is currently constituted no one supports and reconstitutes women affectively and emotionally – either women working in the home or women working in the paid labor force.* Chodorow, N. The Reproduction of Mothering. p. 36 (20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition; University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1999). Cf. also Carrasco C. and Domínguez M. Temps, treball i ocupació: desigualtats de gènere a la ciutat de Barcelona (Time, work and occupation: gender inequalities in the city of Barcelona). Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2001. In 2001, 60% of the women living in Barcelona spent more than 15 hr/week doing household duties (which included taking care of the elderly parents of her partner and doing errands for him), while 60% of the men spent less than 7 hr/week in those tasks. More than half of these women worked also outside their home in a regular paid job.

<sup>2</sup> Castells, Manuel. The Power of Identity. The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Vol. II. (Cambridge, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1997; second edition 2004). Cf. specially chapter 4: The Crisis of Patriarchy. In this chapter Castells presents compelling evidence that the so-called independence of men runs counter the empirical facts. For instance, the health and general wellbeing of divorced men who do not remarry (a minority) worsen while living alone, while the health and general wellbeing of divorced women who do not remarry (a majority) improve while living alone.

The notion of freedom as irreducible individual responsibility for one's life and indeed for 'the wellbeing of all' is the only one that can ground a coherent subjective position in the world<sup>3</sup>. I have named such a notion 'feminist freedom' because it is only through the transcending of our gender identifications (both, feminine and masculine) that one can experience it. To advance my argument, I will bring into dialogue the notion of subjectivation of J. Lacan as theorized by B. Fink<sup>4</sup>, the sexuated process of individuation according to N. Chodorow<sup>5</sup> and the notion of person developed by classical Trinitarian theology<sup>6</sup>. Here I will only be able to present briefly my arguments. I hope in the near future to be able to develop them with greater depth.

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<sup>3</sup> The 'wellbeing of all' is the expression that E. Schüßler Fiorenza (1938-) uses to characterize what she calls the *Ekklesia of Wo-men* and its dynamics of radical democracy. Cf. among many others Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Fink (1956-) is a practicing Lacanian psychoanalyst, analytic supervisor, member of the *École de la Cause freudienne* in Paris, and professor of Psychology at Duquesne University. He is the author of The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) and Fundamentals in Psychoanalytical Technique (New York: Norton, 2007). Together with his wife – who is French – Fink is currently responsible for the translation of Lacan's writings into English. Fink was introduced to Lacanian psychoanalysis by Jacques-Alain Miller, Lacan's son-in-law and his most close collaborator.

<sup>5</sup> Nancy Chodorow (1944-) is a retired professor of sociology from the University of California at Berkeley and a practicing psychoanalyst. Her path-breaking book The Reproduction of Mothering (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1978) is to be counted as one of the earliest and most influential works on feminist psychology to date. The book was re-edited in 1998 with an interesting update introduction by the author. Chodorow has also published Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory (Yale University Press, New Haven and London: 1989), Femininities, Masculinities, Sexualities: Freud and Beyond (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994) and The Power of Feelings: Personal Meaning in Psychoanalysis, Gender, and Culture (Yale University Press, New Haven and London: 1999). Chodorow was introduced to psychoanalytical theory by Philip Slater and was greatly influenced by the works of Karen Horner and Melanie Klein. Her work has been criticized by Freudian scholars as too interpretative and by Lacanian theorists as too empirically grounded.

<sup>6</sup> The notion of person developed by classical Trinitarian theology is the theme of my ThD dissertation: Forcades i Vila, Teresa. Ser persona, avui: Estudi del concepte de 'persona' en la teologia trinitària clàssica i de les seves implicacions per a un antropologia teològica que vulgui assumir el repte de la noció moderna de llibertat. (On Being a Person today: Study of the Concept of 'Person' in Classical Trinitarian Theology and of its Implications for a Theological Anthropology willing to take into Account the Challenge of the Modern Notion of Freedom). Facultat de Teologia de Catalunya (Barcelona). The public defense and subsequent publication of this thesis is expected to take place in Spring 2008.

## 2. The Lacanian process of subjectivation according to Bruce Fink.

### - the crossed subject (\$)

In contrast with the Cartesian subject, the Lacanian subject does not coincide with the intersection of one's knowing and one's being, it does not coincide with self-consciousness but precisely with its reverse <sup>7</sup>: what I really am is that which I cannot grasp of myself. I am not the addition of my qualities. I am my own beyond. I can never be an object for myself. I can never comprehend myself. I am not here to be comprehended by myself or by anybody else. I am here to be acknowledged as incomprehensible and to be loved as such.

Lacan signifies the human subject with the symbol \$ and explains her situation in psychological terms as follows: \$ is the *speaking subject*; in order to become a speaking subject, the child has to adapt her needs to those experienced by others; the child has feelings and sensations that are only hers, that are unique in their quality, but there is no way in which she can communicate them without fitting them into words already in use; in the matching of word and experience, however, there is always a gap, a gap which can never be filled <sup>8</sup>. This breach is signified by the crossing bar of the speaking subject \$ and explains why for Lacan the speaking subject is the same as

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<sup>7</sup> Fink, B. The Lacanian Subject, pp. 42-46.

<sup>8</sup> This is an experience familiar to all those learning a new language. In order to be understood, one must adapt what one feels and thinks to the few words one knows in the foreign language. If one does not use the foreign words, one cannot communicate at all, but on using them one feels nevertheless frustrated because the few foreign words one knows are not exactly those that one needs. Sometimes the word one needs does not even exist in the other language. The frustration comes along because one is already subjectivized, one has already a subjectivity with wants of its own. The case of the infant child is different: before she can speak (before she can think), she cannot be frustrated in her expression of herself (because as yet there is no self in the proper sense); she can only be frustrated in the fulfillment of her basic biological needs (nutrition, warm environment, clean air ...).

the *castrated subject*. It is crucial to note that a hypothetical subject that could be able to express her interiority without *subjecting* it to the rules of the common language and creating in so doing a symbolic world that necessarily mediates and at the same time makes possible her subjective experience, cannot exist<sup>9</sup>. The subject appears precisely in the very process of ‘castration’ that seemingly frustrates her by placing her beyond her own reach<sup>10</sup>. The child before castration cannot be conceived as *free*. In fact, she is more an object than a subject: it has no choice but to (bodily) express what she feels, all that she feels; she is not yet subject because there is no *discontinuity* between her inner world and her outer world, there is no place where she can make a choice; she has no inner world, ‘she’ is world; all there is in her, is out there to see.

#### - the process of subjectivation

According to Fink, the three moments constitutive of the Lacanian notion of subjectivation can be signified as follows<sup>11</sup>:

|                |                |                                       |
|----------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|
| $\frac{A}{\$}$ | $\frac{a}{\$}$ | $\frac{\$}{a}$                        |
| alienation     | separation     | traversing the<br>fundamental fantasy |

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<sup>9</sup> Such a radical ‘lack of subjection’ is actually what characterizes the psychotic episode and the dreams of infantile omnipotence.

<sup>10</sup> In Žižek’s words: *The ‘specifically human’ dimension is thus neither that of the engaged agent caught in the finite life-world context, nor that of universal Reason exempted from the life-world, but the very discord, the ‘vanishing mediator’, between the two.* Žižek, Slavoj. The Ticklish Subject. London – New York: Verso, 1999. p. 16

<sup>11</sup> Fink, *ibid.* pp. 69-79.

Alienation: the way I deal with the gap constitutive of my subjectivity - with the fact that I cannot fully comprehend myself - is by resorting to an external authority<sup>12</sup>. I believe that the authority figure has the answers I lack, and I submit willingly to it<sup>13</sup>. I attempt to eliminate the subjective gap and the pain it causes by pretending that there is no inner world worthy to be taken into account. I live externalized.

Separation: the way I deal with the gap is by submitting to my desire, by giving to my desire the place of honor I used to reserve for the external authority. I attempt to separate myself from the authoritative source of meaning and purpose and pretend to find the inner voice that will guide me to the truth, to my own authenticity. The problem is that this inner voice, this desire, cannot be other than that which has come to me from the outside. My desire is after all not mine, it is 'the desire of the Other'<sup>14</sup>. This is why 'separation' leads to frustration and deeper alienation, because it confuses my desire with my authenticity. How can my *authenticity* be something that can *impose* its demands on me? What kind of 'me' and what kind of 'authenticity' would that be? Am I some sort of pre-programmed self? And who has programmed me? Not God according to St. Augustine, for God has made us so that nobody – not even God – can deal with us without taking our responsibility into account: *God*

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<sup>12</sup> The capital A signifies the big Other (other in French starts with 'a': autre).

<sup>13</sup> This is why 'alienation' is one moment of subjectivation, because it cannot come from outside. I 'alienate myself' when I pretend to transfer the responsibility of my life to somebody else. In this sense, the alienated subject is responsible of her alienation. It needs to be quickly and clearly stated, however, that 'alienation' cannot be judged from outside. What seems 'alienation' is sometimes a conscious subjective decision and what seems liberation is sometimes alienation. I will always remember the wit with which by then 100 years old Benedictine sister M Lluïsa Ramon told me what happened as the men who during the Spanish Civil War burnt her monastery, bursted violently open the door of the church where the sisters were praying. 'Sisters, we are here to bring you freedom!', they shouted. Sister M Lluïsa, then quite young, answered: 'To bring us freedom? To take it away from us, would you mean!'. And the abbess knocked her hard on the head.

<sup>14</sup> The small 'a' signifies the Lacanian 'object petit a'. For our purposes suffice to read it as the internalization of the capital 'A', as the desire of the Other. The concept of 'the desire of the Other' will be immediately explained in the main text.

*created us without us: but he did not will to save us without us*<sup>15</sup>. It makes no sense to conceive *authenticity of self* as something ‘already there’; it has to be an ‘event’ of which *I am the subject*, something that cannot happen without my consent; something that demands my active and responsible participation.

But before I can move on to characterize the subject as ‘responsible event’ instead of ‘pre-existing authenticity’, I need to pause to explain better why have I claimed – following Lacan – that my own desire is in a sense not mine. Why is my desire necessarily the ‘desire of the Other’?

Each of us has certain likes and dislikes that she can justify with sound reasons from her own experience, and certain others that seem to be of a rather mysterious nature. Those that belong to the second kind are the ones that interest us here because it is to them that the notion of authenticity or personal identity is usually attached. The likes and dislikes of the first kind have a distinct beginning in my personal history. I know when they started, hence I can also imagine they might one day cease to be. They cannot help me answer the question: what/who was I before I had this particular like or dislike, this particular desire? The desires of the second kind are something different. It seems rather reasonable to assume that those of my desires for which I do not have a rational explanation or a grounding experience, cannot be other than true expressions of my inner being and represent as such ‘my authenticity’. Nothing further from the truth!, warns us Lacan<sup>16</sup>. For those pre-rational desires cannot be

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<sup>15</sup> St. Augustine, Sermo 169,11,13:PL 38,923.

<sup>16</sup> And the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor backs him up in describing the romantic origins of our ideals of authenticity of self: [there has been a] *massive subjective turn in modern culture, a new form of inwardness, in which we come to think of ourselves as beings with inner depths* (Gutmann, Amy (ed). The Politics of Recognition in Multiculturalism. Princeton Univ Press, 1994. p. 29). Cf. also

other than a particular set of the desires of the significant Other of my childhood, usually the mother. Even though it will be a long quote, let me allow Fink to express this key Lacanian notion in his own words:

*The unconscious is nothing but a 'chain' of signifying elements, such as words, phonemes, and letters, which 'unfolds' in accordance with very precise rules over which the ego or self has no control whatsoever. **Rather than being the privileged seat of subjectivity, the unconscious, as understood by Lacan (except in the expression "subject of the unconscious", which we shall come to later), is itself Other, foreign, and unassimilated.** Most of us probably think, as did Freud, that the analysand who blurts out "schnob" instead of "job" is revealing his or her true colors: a gripe against a father who paid too much attention to an older sibling and not enough to the analysand, and a wish that it had been otherwise. And yet, while that desire may be considered truer, in some sense, than other desires expressed by the analysand in "ego mode" (e.g., "I really want to become a better person"), **it may nevertheless be a foreign desire: the Other's desire.** The analysand who says "schnob" may go on to say that it was, in fact, his mother who felt that his father was a schmuck and who repeatedly told him that his father was neglecting him; he may come to realize that he stopped himself from loving his father and began resenting him only to please his mother. "I wasn't the one who wanted to reproach him", he may conclude, "she was". **In this sense, we can think of the unconscious as expressing, through its irruptions into everyday speech, a desire that is itself foreign and unassimilated**<sup>17</sup>.*

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Taylor's master work Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

<sup>17</sup> Fink, *ibid.* p. 9. The bold highlighting is mine.

It is because our most inner desires might remain in this sense unassimilated and foreign to us, that the moment of 'separation' is also a moment of externalization, a moment of alienation, a fantasy that needs to be traversed every time we want to act freely and lovingly.

Traversing the fundamental fantasy: we finally come to the third moment of subjectivation, the only one able to bring fulfillment by allowing the subject to appear on top of her desire. The other two moments (the moment of alienation and the moment of separation) are also moments of subjectivation because 'not being a subject' is not an option: I am responsible for my own life no matter what; I am responsible for it even if I don't want to; but - despite being moments of subjectivation - they are not moments of *fulfillment* because the subject manifests herself by hiding (under the capital 'A' or under the small 'a'), by refusing to take full responsibility for her own life. What do I ought to do?, asks the modern subject. There is only one option, answers the subject of alienation: I have to do whatever the One-who-knows tells me to do. There is only one option, answers the subject of separation: I have to do whatever my inner impulses and desires tell me to do. What makes both these subjects so alike despite their apparent opposition and the fact that they are endlessly fighting against each other in real life, is that both see only one potential moral option ahead. For the subject traversing the fundamental fantasy, on the contrary, there is always more than one potential moral option ahead: I can morally obey the Law or I can morally disobey the Law; I can morally listen to my inner voice or I can morally choose not to listen to it; I can also morally listen and pay attention to other voices around me not invested with any particular authority; I can also morally wait and do nothing; I can morally try something new and I can morally

change direction. What characterizes the subject traversing the fundamental fantasy is that she is aware of the extent of her freedom and is ready to take responsibility for it.

Although I have no time to develop it, I would like to end this section pointing out the parallelism that can be established between the three Lacanian moments of subjectivation just described and 1. the evolving political consciousness of humanity together with the social models that emerge from it; 2. the classical three ‘vias’ of the mystical experience:

|                                    |  |  |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| $\frac{A}{\$}$                     | $\frac{a}{\$}$                         | $\frac{\$}{a}$                           |
| alienation                         | separation                             | traversing the<br>fundamental fantasy    |
| premodern<br>heteronomy            | modern<br>autonomy                     | deliberative<br>democracy? <sup>18</sup> |
| via purgativa<br><i>God is Law</i> | via illuminativa<br><i>God is Love</i> | via unitiva<br><i>I love</i>             |

Whatever the applications we end up doing, it is key to remember that the markers of the *traversing of the fundamental fantasy* are the acknowledgement of ultimate responsibility for one’s life and the identification of the self with its desiring capacity (and not anymore with the objective content of its desires, be it the objective fulfillment of the Law or the intimate satisfaction of the inner drives). On traversing the fundamental fantasy, I realize that I am a desiring self not closed and not definable

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<sup>18</sup> Gutmann A., Thompson D. *Why deliberative democracy?* Princeton University Press, 2004

<sup>19</sup>. I acknowledge not as a theory but *in a real act*, that I am not comprehensible but that I am lovable and can love. I can embrace my reality (yes, including the inner impulses and fears that drive me crazy and come from my mother's whims or from whoever got to influence me most in my early childhood). I can embrace all this and move ahead with it in the direction I see fit (or less unfit). I cannot change most of my reality: where and when I was born, who were my parents and how did they behave towards me, my basic physical appearance, most of my talents, my basic fears, any accidents or bad experiences I may have had ... etc. I cannot change any of this but nobody and no circumstances can force me to embrace it, to truly accept it. To – not in theory but *in fact* - truly accept my life as it is here and now, is an act of absolutely free love.

### 3. The sexuated process of individuation according to Nancy Chodorow.

Chodorow's key insight in her early work *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) is not that the girl identifies with the mother and thus reproduces her mothering *skills*: caring for the little and the sick, being soft and agreeable, tending the house, ... etc. As Adrienne Rich has provocatively argued, the issue is rather far more complex <sup>20</sup>. There is no doubt that what one's mother *does* is very important. If she never utters a clear-cut 'No', never sets limits, never enacts authority or never prevails over the father; if she stays at home or instead has a paid job ... etc., all this is surely bound to have a great influence on her children and their gender expectations; nevertheless, it is

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<sup>19</sup> This would be the same experience that the Catalan philosopher Joan Pegueroles, sj identifies in C.S. Lewis' distinction between 'happiness' and 'joy' (*Surprised by Joy*, Fount Paperbacks, 1981; p. 20), and in P. Claudel's distinction between 'bonheur' and 'joie'. Cf. Pegueroles, Joan. *Díptico sobre la felicidad*. *Espíritu* XLVIII (1999); pp. 181-87.

<sup>20</sup> Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980) Published in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*. Norton Paperback: New York 1994.

not *the behavior* of the mother what constitutes the main source of the ‘reproduction of mothering’. There is a deeper level at which this reproduction takes place and goes hand in hand with the shaping of the basic feminine and masculine identities<sup>21</sup>. The key factor that Chodorow keenly observed is that the process of individuation, the process by which a child gains for the first time consciousness of being a ‘self’ distinct from that of her mother (or mother substitute) takes place for the girl but not for the boy *in continuity* with the maternal self. For both – girl and boy – the symbolic separation from the mother (or mother substitute) is a source of great anxiety: *the mother nourishes, warms and protects me, separation from her equals death*; this would be the basic infantile fear, the first experience of fear of our developing psyche. The girl separates from the mother by internalizing the maternal ‘lost object’: *I am not my mother but I am like her*. This option is not available to the boy, as he must accept that: *I am not my mother and I am not like her*. There is no point in pretending that the boy identifies with his father in the same way that the girl identifies with her mother, because the father – unless the mother is no longer available and even then - cannot substitute her in the primal bond because it has to do with pregnancy and delivery – always - and breast feeding – in most cases -<sup>22</sup>. The so-called ‘first erotic object’ - that is, the target at which the first desire of the developing psyche of a child is wholeheartedly aimed - is in the vast majority if not all cases ‘a woman’<sup>23</sup>. It is from

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<sup>21</sup> According to Chodorow: *Most conventional accounts of gender-role socialization rely on individual intention and behavioral criteria, which do not adequately explain women’s mothering. Psychoanalysis, by contrast, provides a systemic, structural account of socialization and social reproduction. It suggests that major features of the social organization of gender are transmitted in and through those personalities produced by the structure of the institution – the family – in which children become gendered members of society.* Chodorow, *ibid.* p. 39

<sup>22</sup> That the father cannot substitute the mother in the primal bond does not mean that it is not important that the father holds, consoles and nurtures the child from its birth. As we shall see, by adopting the role of caretaker of his children, the father fosters them into a freer and more loving adulthood.

<sup>23</sup> Julia Kristeva has applied this insight – and the empirical fact that the overwhelming majority of us have had during our infancy a female body but not a male body at our disposal in order to fulfill our

‘a woman’ that the individuating child must separate, and it is of decisive importance for her/his future personality if this separation constitutive of the ‘self’ takes place through an identification with the ‘erotic object’ or not. As already stated, the identification is possible in the case of the girl (it is reasonable for her to expect to grow up into being ‘a mother’), but not for the boy. The consequence of this sexuated process of individuation is that if I am a girl, ‘being myself’ will have something to do with ‘being in continuity with those I love’; while if I am a boy, ‘being myself’ will have something to do with ‘being in discontinuity with those I love’. Assuming that we carry at least in part these infantile personalities into adulthood, it is not difficult to deduce from them some of the key features of the interpersonal dynamics still prevalent in most heterosexual couples: the women complain that the men don’t pay enough attention to their emotional needs; the men complain that the women do not allow them enough personal space. Usually both are right in their complains but – so do I claim – they are only partially right in their explanation: a woman often suspects (rightly) that her man’s need for more personal space is not ‘freedom’ but ‘fear from dependency’, but usually is convinced (falsely) that her own need for more emotional attention is ‘true love’; a man often suspects (rightly) that his woman’s need for more emotional attention is not ‘love’ but ‘fear from solitude’, but usually is convinced (falsely) that his own need for more personal space is ‘true freedom’<sup>24</sup>.

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nutritional and emotional needs – to the study of gender violence, trying to understand why is it that most battered women feel guilty while most batterers feel enraged at the injustice being done *to them*. Cf. Reineke, Martha Jane. *Sacrificed Lives: Kristeva on Women and Violence*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997. It is a known fact that the batterers usually feel justified in their doing and complain: ‘You have no idea how much I love my wife. If I have hurt her so badly, imagine how much more badly she [or somebody else] must have hurt me!’ While many battered women feel guilty: ‘I should have known better. He looked angry as he came home tonight. I shouldn’t have bothered him’.

<sup>24</sup> Mt 7, 1-5: *Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.*

Chodorow's surprise was that while attempting to deepen her knowledge of the reproduction of mothering and of gender identities *in order to undermine them*, she became progressively aware of the existence and the decisive importance of a rather trans-cultural element that seemed to resist change. Her critics have been quick in pointing out this contradiction between Chodorow's stated goals and the implications of her work and in holding her accountable for it, while she herself has remained intellectually honest enough not to manipulate her insights and her data (clinical and sociological) to fit the demands of certain narrow-minded discourses:

*In recent years, I have stressed the clinical individuality of personal gender, including the clinical individuality of any mother-daughter relationship. My point here is that culture, whether it be a hegemonic culture imposed on or internalized by subordinate groups or the particular culture of a specific group, does not determine the personal meaning of gender, the particularity of any mother's unconscious fantasies about her daughter or the complex particularity of how any daughter images her mother or her mother's gender. Each of these is created with characteristic emotional tonalities for the individual and for the intersubjective pair (individual tonalities that also engage and reshape cultural forms and that may have prevalent features for many members of a particular culture in contrast to another culture). This unconscious realm of psychological meaning shapes the experience of the mother, of the daughter, and of any relationship mutually created by two individual psychological subjectivities. As *The Reproduction of Mothering* claims, whatever the particular mother-daughter relationship, whatever the uniquely created self and gender of the mother, and whatever the particular cultural inflections of maternity*

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*or femininity, both daughter and mother experience this relationship intensely, such that it contributes in profound ways to the creation and the experience of the self*<sup>25</sup>.

I claim that Chodorow's dilemma and what she is hinting at with her emphasis on the 'individuality of personal gender' can be fruitfully read in light of the Lacanian notion of subjectivation as exposed in the first section of this article. Such a reading would place the gender difference at the level of the little 'a'. What seems to hold the promise of personal fulfillment for a woman (her little 'a'), would have something to do with the desire to 'identify with those she loves' (and hence her gendered fear would be 'fear of solitude'); while what seems to hold the promise of personal fulfillment for a man (his little 'a') would have something to do with the desire to 'resist identification with those he loves' (and hence his gendered fear would be 'fear of dependency'). A woman that has not yet traversed her fundamental fantasy would therefore have a tendency to (falsely) think of herself as 'more loving' than her male partners; while a man that has not yet traversed his fundamental fantasy would have a tendency to (falsely) think of himself as 'freer' than her female partners. Both would be wrong, for as we shall see in the next section, not only in psychological terms but also in theological ontology, love and freedom cannot be separated.

#### **4. The notion of person according to classical Trinitarian theology.**

One could rightly argue – as the Lacanian psychoanalyst and theorist David Nasio did in my first telephone conversation with him<sup>26</sup> -, that there is nothing in principle

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<sup>25</sup> Chodorow, *ibid.* p. xii. The quoted text belongs to the introduction written for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of The Reproduction of Mothering (University of California Press, 1999).

further removed from the Lacanian subject than the Christian notion of ‘person’. Nasio pointed to me that Lacan never uses the term ‘person’ if not to criticize it and to distance himself from it. For Lacan, the subject is always a ‘fleeting subject’<sup>27</sup>, in Žižek’s words a ‘vanishing mediator’<sup>28</sup>, an ‘event’ that has no substantive ontological ground. Christian theology, on the contrary, claims that the human being is ‘a person’ precisely because she has a substantive essence, because she has been made ‘to the image and likeness of God’.

These two seemingly irreconcilable positions can begin to come closer, however, when one takes a better look at the notion of ‘person’ as it has evolved in classical Trinitarian theology<sup>29</sup>. Since Augustine’s great work *De Trinitate*, the notion of ‘divine person’ has been characterized by the constitutive dimensions of ‘esse in’ and ‘esse ad’<sup>30</sup>. The ‘esse in’ points to the irreducible incommunicability constitutive of

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<sup>26</sup> Juan-David Nasio is a psychoanalyst in Paris and former member of the École Freudienne of Jacques Lacan. He teaches at the University of Paris VII (Sorbonne) and is director of the Séminaires Psychanalytiques de Paris, a major center for psychoanalytical training and the dissemination of psychoanalytical thought to non-specialists. He has authored many books on Lacanian psychoanalysis, among which: *Five Lessons on the Psychoanalytical Theory of Jacques Lacan*. Albany: State University of New York, 1998.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Fink *ibid.* pp. 77-79

<sup>28</sup> See note 10 of the present article.

<sup>29</sup> Since the pioneer work of Catherina LaCugna, many theologians have argued that the times are ripe for a Trinitarian Christian anthropology that places at its center the notion of relationship and of unity in diversity. See among others:

LaCugna, Catherine M. *The Trinitarian Mystery of God in Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*. Ed. F Schüssler-Fiorenza i JP Galvin. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1981.

LaCugna, CM *God for us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. New York: HarperSan Francisco, 1991.

LaCugna, CM, ed. *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993.

Johnson, Elizabeth A. *She who is: the mystery of God in feminist theological discourse*. Crossroad: New York, 1997.

Greshake, Gisbert. *Der dreieine Gott: eine trinitarische Theologie*. Herder, 2004.

Cox, Patricia A. *God as communion*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001.

Coakley, Sarah. ‘Persons’ in the ‘social’ doctrine of the Trinity. In *Powers and Submissions*. Blackwell Publishers, 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Augustine. *De Trinitate*; cf. book 5.5, book 6.2, book 6.3

each person, while the ‘esse ad’ points to a modality of ‘being in relationship’ that – here comes the crucial point – is *as constitutive and as primordial* as the irreducible incommunicability. As constitutive and as primordial. Not more, not less. I insist in pointing this feature out because it introduces at the core of the notion of ‘divine person’ a dynamic that forbids us to conceive this person as a ‘static substance’, and compels us to view her instead as a ‘pure act’<sup>31</sup>, a timeless ‘becoming’ with no origin and no end. The Triune God is not conceivable as a ‘solitary Being’; in fact, the very notion of Being needs to change radically when viewed from the Trinitarian standpoint: if we take the Trinity seriously, we cannot anymore conceive ‘Being’ as inert *substance* but only as dynamic *communion*, as free and loving Relationship<sup>32</sup>.

What does ‘being created to the image and likeness’ of this communion God mean for the notion of ‘human person’? The many philosophical and theological issues that need to be carefully and systematically addressed in pushing forward the analogy between the divine and the human cannot be developed here, but I would like nevertheless to call attention to the fact that ‘esse in’ (constitutive irreducibility) and ‘esse ad’ (constitutive relationality) cannot be conceived as ‘complementary’ in the Trinitarian divine person. Trinitarian ‘esse in’ and ‘esse ad’ do not complement each other but rather *identify* with each other. ‘The only real distinctions in God are the distinctions between persons’, claims classic Christian theology in the words of

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The Capadocian fathers had already started to establish the notion of inseparability between the relations and the substance of the divine persons: cf. Basilus of Cesarea On the Spirit 25.59 and Gregorius of Nazianz, Theological Discourses, discourse 29.9.

<sup>31</sup> Augustine. De Trinitate, book 5 8.9: *Quod autem ad faciendum attinet, fortassis de solo Deo verissime dicatur: solus enim Deus facit et ipse non fit, neque patitur quantum ad eius substantiam pertinet qua Deus est.*

<sup>32</sup> Zizioulas, J. Being as communion. St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press: New York, 2002.

Thomas Aquinas<sup>33</sup>. All other distinctions that we can conceive of (i.e. the distinction between essence and persons, the distinction between essence and existence, the distinction between relation and substance ... etc.), are distinctions needed by our intellect (by our *modus cognoscendi*) to name the ineffable simple reality of the Triune God, but are not at all *real*.

It is the claim of many contemporary Trinitarian theologians<sup>34</sup>, that our being created in the image of the Triune God forbids us to speak of our human freedom as somehow ‘preceding’ our human love. I consider the ‘esse in’ and ‘esse ad’ dimensions of the ‘divine person’ to correspond analogically to the ‘freedom’ and ‘love’ dimensions of the ‘human person’. As our study of the Lacanian subject has taught us, it is not possible *to be free* before loving or *to love* without being free. The act of human subjectivation – the act that allows us to take possession of our freedom by acknowledging the gap in us - is necessarily a *positive* act, an act of embracing one’s reality, an act of love.

From the perspective of the inseparability of freedom and love, the stereotypes of gender that consider women more loving than men, and men freer than women cannot be sustained. If Being is communion, the separation of ‘freedom’ and ‘love’ lacks ontological consistency:

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<sup>33</sup> *Dictum est enim supra, cum de divinis nominibus agebatur, quod plus continetur in perfectione divinae essentiae, quam aliquo nomine significari possit. Unde non sequitur quod in Deo, praeter relationem, sit aliquid aliud secundum rem; sed solum considerata nominum ratione* (ST I q.28 a.2 second solution).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. those quoted in note 29 of the present article.

*To be 'a person' is to be able to live in communion like the Father, the Son and the Spirit do*<sup>35</sup>. This does not mean - as the anthropologies of complementarity claim – to live in a mutually faithful heterosexual partnership, nor does it mean to become hermaphrodite (to somehow manage to be both man and woman at the same time). What it means is that in order to achieve personal fulfillment we need to acknowledge the illusory character of our gender identities and to transcend – in Lacan's words 'to traverse' - them, that is, to move beyond the infantile processes of individuation that tend to reduce our personal being (created to the image of God as a unique self able to relate to others in gratuity and reciprocity) to the gender stereotypes of 'femininity' (a capacity for 'love' that exceeds one's capacity for 'freedom') or 'masculinity (a capacity for 'freedom' that exceeds one's capacity for 'love)'<sup>36</sup>.

## 5. Towards a notion of feminist freedom.

Are we to conclude, then, that we need to purify ourselves of our desires – particularly of the sexual kind - in order to be fulfilled and mature human beings?

Not at all. Identifying the desires of our gendered identities (in all their modalities: heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual and even asexual) with Lacan's little 'a' means that they are here to stay. Our desires – sexual and otherwise – are our springboard. It is an old saying of monastic wisdom that our passions contain the energy that will bring us to heaven. We don't have to eliminate them or wish they did not exist; the only thing we have to do is to take responsibility for them. What that means, each one

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<sup>35</sup> Jo 17, 21: That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me (i[na pa,ntej e]n w=sin( kaqw.j su,( pa,ter( evn evmoi. kavgw. evn soi,( i[na kai. auvtói. evn h`mi/n w=sin( i[na o` ko,smoj pisteu,h| o[ti su, me avpe,steilaj).

<sup>36</sup> Slightly modified translation for the original Catalan: Forcades i Vila, T. La Trinitat, avui (The Trinity today). Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2005. p. 83-84

needs to decide for herself, knowing that the ‘traversing of the primordial fantasy’ constitutive of our maturity does not take place once and for all: it needs to happen again and again as long as we live in space and time, as long as we are part of history.

I would like to close with the final remarks of my study of feminist theology in history <sup>37</sup>, for they illustrate in a snapshot the amazing changes the objective content of our gendered identities has undergone in order to preserve its infantile meaning, that is, in order to help the woman and the man remain *under* their little ‘a’. Are we ready to try going on top of it?

*As a synthesis, we could characterize as follows the historically evolving role of feminist theology: 1. in pre-modern patriarchal societies and cultures, feminist theology claims that God has created women and men equal in dignity: it is not God who considers women less spiritual than men; 2. in early Modernity (from the invention of the press to the French Revolution), feminist theology claims that God has created women and men equal in intelligence and that it is God’s will that both foster to the maximum the talents given to them: it is not God who forbids women the access to superior education; 3. during the consolidation of Modernity (from the French Revolution to the symbolic 1968), feminist theology claims that God has created women and men equal in freedom and in their capacity to take responsibility in the public domain: it is not God who forbids the access of women to politics, to the army, to paid professions or to the priesthood; and 4. in our post-modern times (from 1968 to the present), feminist theology claims that God has created women and men equal in love and in the capacity to take responsibility in the domestic domain: it is*

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<sup>37</sup> In this study, I applied the term ‘feminist theologian’ to all those who – even if they lived before the term ‘feminism’ was coined - considered that the way the religion or the society of their time characterized women was too narrow-minded and contrary to God’s will.

*not God who forbids men to care for the children, the household, the sick, the old or the disabled.*

*In today's world all these historical struggles are still taking place. In Catalonia – and in Western societies in general-, the pre-modern thesis are not prevalent: rare is the Westerner, woman or man, who truly believes that women are inferior in dignity to men or that they are less fit for spiritual matters. The danger is rather the contrary. In a compensatory and reductive move, there are some among us who consider that women somehow have a greater dignity or are more spiritual or closer to God than men, precisely because women are – according to them – more emotional than rational, more loving.*

*The task of feminist theology today is to open ways so that we can all together build societies that, while relying and fostering the equality in dignity, in intelligence and in freedom of women and men, rely and foster as well the equality in their loving capacity for - as Augustine's well-known sentence 'Love and do as you please' so succinctly expresses – love and freedom are inseparable. This sentence of Augustine holds no contradiction and points to no double moral standard. It is the most concise affirmation of the truth of our personal being: only in freedom it is possible to love; only in love it is possible to be free. Freedom does not precede love, but neither does love precede freedom. Be I woman or man, the degree to which I love equals the degree to which I am free. The parallel is strict and admits no exception: so much do I have of love, so much of freedom; so much do I have of freedom, so much of love. The transformation of the present world and the coming of the Kingdom of God that gives meaning to our history, do not depend on the theoretical acknowledging of this*

*truth, but rather on its daily personal experience. For – in the words of Rabia al-Basri – ‘Who tastes, knows; who explains, lies’<sup>38</sup>.*

Trier, January 2008

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*Teresa Forcades i Vila (1966) is a physician (internal medicine, 1995), theologian and Benedictine nun at the mountain monastery of Sant Benet de Montserrat (Catalonien, Spain). Master of Divinity (Harvard, 1997; on multicultural dialogue), doctor in Public Health (Univ. Barcelona, 2004; on alternative medicine), doctor in Sacred Theology (Facultat de Teologia de Catalunya, 2008; on the relationship between the classical Trinitarian concept of ‘person’ and the modern notion of ‘freedom’ as self-determination). At present, she carries on her post-doctoral research on medical and theological anthropology at the Humboldt Universität in Berlin.*

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<sup>38</sup> Forcades i Vila, Teresa. La Teologia Feminista en la Història. Barcelona: Fragmenta, 2007. p. 125-26.