I come to this presentation with a good deal of trepidation and curiosity. I have worried about how to discuss a topic that mainly pertains to Vajrayana Buddhism so that it is relevant to non-Vajrayana Buddhists and to non-Buddhists, and about how to avoid Vajrayana chauvinism in my discussion. I have also wondered whether I have enough experience and knowledge of my topic to discuss it.

It has been exciting, however, to discover that this topic strongly brings together my personal meditation practice and my professional interests. When I initially chose this topic, I wanted to reflect on my acquaintance with the practice of the sadhana of Vajrayogini, which I have been doing for the past three years. Traditionally, it is said that this practice, which is somewhat advanced, involves developing the "feminine principle." The sadhana of Vajrayogini is a very traditional and important practice in Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism, especially within the Karma Kagyu lineage.* Usually this practice is assigned to the student after considerable practice in formless samatha-vipashyana practice (somewhat similar to Zazen) and after completion of ngondro (the Vajrayana preliminaries), but typically, it is also the first sadhana, the first so-called "deity-yoga" or yidam practice, that one does. Vajrayogini is called "the glorious co-emergent Mother;" she is female in her

* From a talk at Naropa Institute, Boulder, Colorado. July, 1982

** I am affiliated with this lineage as a student of Vajracarya, the Venerable Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche.

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iconography and visualization, and her practice develops one's awareness of and appreciation for "the feminine principle" in one's self and the world. Such development is considered necessary before doing *sadhanas* connected with the masculine principle, at least according to the tradition in which I am being trained.

When I began to do this practice, naturally I was eager to explore it, since it is so important to the Kagyu lineage. However, I also had lingering questions and doubts about the relevance of dividing reality into "a feminine principle" and "a masculine principle," as is typical in Vajrayana Buddhism. This skepticism directly derived from feminism, which remains central in my value system. I wanted to explore all my doubts and questions, including the meaning of the terms "masculine" or "feminine principles" in Vajrayana Buddhism in the context of my experience with the *sadhana* of Vajrayogini. As one works slowly with the oral tradition and the practice, one realizes one is working with materials quite different from conventional patriarchal sex roles, psychological archetypes, or gender-linked psychological traits or experiences. However, rather than beginning by presenting the feminine or masculine principles in Tibetan Buddhism, I want first to retrace my disillusionments with other variants on the theme of feminine and masculine principles.

For years, I've been deeply concerned with basic questions about the feminine principle, and my seminars and publications about the "divine feminine" and the Goddess, though not Buddhist, essentially have been on the same topic (Gross, 1978; 1981b). I have also realized that, though I approach this topic with hesitancy and ambivalence, I am also drawn to it willy-nilly from almost every perspective. It is my hope, therefore, that I can raise into sharp focus basic questions about "the feminine principle," even if much of my discussion is quite open-ended.

My exploration focuses on the essential claim of Vajrayana Buddhism regarding masculine and feminine principles—that the teachings and the practices involve and promote a *balance of masculine and feminine principles in the phenomenal world*. This exploration involves three questions. The first question is whether it is relevant or useful to talk about feminine or masculine principles at all. Then we can explore what a balance of masculine and feminine principles would be. And finally, we should not forget to consider how the masculine and feminine principles would manifest in the phenomenal world *in a balanced way*. 
Why do we need to differentiate experience into a masculine and a feminine principle? Why do so many traditions do so? Is it helpful or oppressive to do so? In my own life and work, I have both questioned the validity of such differentiation and attempted to foster a positive feminine principle. In my youth, what was called the feminine principle, or "true womanhood," was mainly an attempt to discriminate against my intelligence and to convince me to be satisfied with subservience. Based on that experience, I saw no reason to rally to defend that version of "the feminine principle." I turned instead in defense to notions of "common humanity" beyond female and male, a common humanity that recognized that there are no significant differences between women and men. But at the same time, and not completely consistently, I also developed a rationale for the need specifically to study women and I became very interested in goddesses and the divine feminine. I was also very uneasy about "androgyny," which seemed to be only an invitation for women to become male-identified, something I resisted.

Though it was difficult to pinpoint my frustration and dissatisfaction with these conventional and culturally familiar examples, I now realize I was much more concerned about an imbalance between the masculine and feminine principles than about the actual presence of a feminine principle, per se. That imbalance manifests in two ways, both of which are found in most or all Western versions of the feminine or masculine principles. They are imbalanced due to an implicit or explicit hierarchy of the two principles. They are also imbalanced because of a common assumption that men manifest the masculine principle and women manifest the feminine principle.

It is critical not to suppose an identity between symbolic or mythological masculine or feminine principles and male or female human forms. When I talk about feminine or masculine principles, I am always talking about what might roughly be called "mythological or symbolic" images or certain psychological traits that are not sex-linked. It is important to stress this preliminary distinction between feminine or masculine principles and male or female persons because the two are so frequently equated. Having stressed that distinction, we can return to the question of the usefulness of dichotomizing experience into masculine and feminine principles. In fact, the tendency to find a masculine and a feminine principle in experience is so widespread that we have no choice but to discuss and utilize these ideas while maintaining a critical perspective because they have so often been used in ways that do not enhance human goodness and wholeness.
This critical perspective will be applied first to the three major Western concepts of the feminine principle: classical traditional Western monotheism, Jungian psychological constructs, and contemporary feminist counter-images.

Technically speaking, there is no feminine principle in Western religions at the orthodox level. The three great "reforms" of the initial Western religious imperative (monotheism, transcendence over nature, and abolition of divine gender) so successfully scuttled the idea of a divine feminine that the slogan, "Trust in God-s-She will provide" is a radical teaser, while the slogan, "Trust in G0d-He will provide" would be only mainstream conventional piety, somewhat saccharine and unnotable. Monotheism, one of the great inventions of Western religious thought, was supposed to ensure the recognition of the one power behind the many forms. This one power is supposed to transcend gender altogether. Nevertheless, "He" and all its variants, is conventional, while "she" and all its variants, including a female priesthood, is anathema, or at least unconventional. I have often suggested that such a manifestation of supposed gender transcendence is not a transcendence of gender at all, but a divinization of masculinity at the expense of a demonization of femininity. Therefore, though in conventional Western religious mythology, the feminine principle technically is not recognized, frequently it crops up as a shadow, demonic other, Dra seducer. Sometimes it emerges as a legitimate "mystical" or esoteric component of Western religious imagery. The extent to which this attenuated version of the feminine principle is aberrant in world religions is only beginning to be recognized by scholars and mystics of Western traditions. Most other world religions do have a significantly more developed feminine principle (see Gross, 1981a).

In Western thought, psychology is a recent invention, and has emerged as a likely refuge for the feminine principle. Jungian psychology especially has called for a revalorization of the feminine "unconscious." Stressing a limited androgyne for psychologically mature persons and the importance of the dark and banished "other" feminine qualities of the psyche, Jungian thought has often inspired self-development, and served as a corrective to the one-sided masculine emphases of mainstream Western mythic imagery. Recently, however, some have argued that, despite the Jungian highlighting of the banished, dark feminine qualities, Jungian thought does not contain much balance of masculine and feminine principles. "Light" and "conscious" male attributes remained "good" and more often were attributed to men than to women. The existence of "dark" and "unconscious" female attributes was recognized,
and these attributes were said to be elemental. But men's and women's psyches were not thought to have similar relationships to these “light masculine conscious” and “dark feminine unconscious” qualities. Furthermore, a relative valuing and disvaluing of these respective principles continued, despite Jungian recognition of the importance of both to psychological life (Goldenberg, 1977; 1979, pp. 56-71; see also Neumann, 1954, pp. 5-143).

Having found much Western mythology and psychology disappointing in these matters, it is not surprising that many people have turned to a non-traditional version of the feminine principle. The feminist spirituality movement is the only Western religion that avowedly and openly emphasizes a feminine principle. Many segments of the contemporary feminist spirituality movement, however, do not seek or value a balance of feminine and masculine principles either. Frequently, their elevation of the feminine principle also involves denigration of masculinity, seeing it as a defective, unfortunate or maimed condition. So, rather than being an alternative to conventional spirituality, the feminist movement often functions as conventional spirituality, in reverse, i.e., affirming one principle at the cost of castigating the other.

Thus all the major, contemporary Western mythological or psychological systems with which I am familiar fail to have an equalizing balance between masculine and feminine principles, and tend to use familiar examples of feminine or masculine principles competitively and oppressively. No matter which way the labels are attached, a “good-bad” duality predominates. Additionally, for the most part, men and women are basically supposed to be like “the masculine” or “the feminine,” respectively. In such a system there will always be “winners” and “losers” and it will be difficult for anyone to feel spiritually whole. It is easy to see why an interest in a feminine principle could be tempered with caution or skepticism about the idea of dividing experience into a duality that is seen as “female” and “male.”

I have found, however, an equally balanced duality of feminine and masculine mythic images compellingly attractive, especially when the feminine principle is dignified and healthy. Though I am not convinced that, in general, women manifest the feminine principle more than they manifest the masculine principle, or more than men manifest the feminine principle, it does seem clear to me that women's psyches (and men's also) simply do better, simply are healthier and saner when both are deeply imbued with mythic images of a dignified feminine.
principle. I would like to look more deeply into the reasons for this sense of well-being that goes with a truly balanced expression of feminine and masculine principles by considering more carefully their duality, interrelationship, and unity.

In stressing the "common humanity" underlying masculine or feminine principles, I had originally misdiagnosed the problem. The problem is not the duality of the principles, but the way in which that duality is handled. In fact it seems that the problem with the Western versions of feminine and masculine principles is not that they are too dualistic, but that they are not dualistic enough. It is the lack of appreciation for duality, distinction, and differentiation that manifests as the imbalance between the masculine and feminine principles.

The major mythological image of contemporary Western religious tradition, as we all know, is that of a single supreme being, of no gender, in a pristine and rarified theological state, and of decidedly masculine gender in the popular imagination. The singularity of this Supreme Being, otherwise known as monotheism, has profoundly influenced the belief that oneness is superior to duality or multiplicity. Because of the monolithic emphasis on monistic unity, duality is reduced to oneness, usually by the attempted elimination of part of the duality. We could ask why the feminine principle rather than the masculine principle was eliminated in the attempt to purge multiplicity or duality from the mythic system and to reform the core myth into monotheism. Aside from the political-economics involved in eliminating the feminine rather than the masculine principle, the enduring historical problems of Western monotheism point to the fact that duality, distinctiveness and differentiation cannot be eliminated in order to reduce everything to oneness.

The importance of appreciating duality, multiplicity, and the specific qualities of each separate element, is at the heart of my answer to the question of the relevance or usefulness of the idea of feminine and masculine principles. If the distinctiveness of specific elements is not destroyed when overarching unity is recognized, then the feminine and masculine principles can complement rather than compete with each other. In fact, no image more effectively promotes this simultaneous appreciation of duality and unity than that of complementary but distinctive female and male mythological images, such as those found in Vajrayana Buddhism, with its great appreciation for both the Many and the One. I will return to the images of this tradition later. Here, I want to point out that it is a way, a vehicle showing that the feminine principle is not something we are stuck with and must work with, but is actually a tremendous resource.
Simply recognizing a duality of feminine and masculine principles is not enough. If we emphasize their duality but do not see them in balance, an understanding of their relationship will be incomplete. To me, the single most important requirement for balance between feminine and masculine principles is their primordial and elemental co-equality. A balance of feminine and masculine can in no way involve a hierarchy of one dominating the other. In other words, the mere inclusion of a feminine image beside or along with a masculine image does not necessarily imply a balance between them. We could simply have an image of "He" and "His consort," an image that is quite prevalent in many religious and mythic contexts, including even the Jungian context, in my view. This image in no way connotes or communicates a balance of feminine and masculine elements, despite the inclusion of a feminine image. Two popular images from Western culture will help us see clearly the difference between an androcentric imbalance of female and male energy and a truly co-equal balance of male and female energies.

Some of the space probes of the middle-to-late seventies involved placing objects on spacecraft that could perhaps be found at some point by beings from other civilizations in our galaxy or perhaps be found at some point by beings from other civilizations in our galaxy or perhaps other galaxies. These objects were selected to impart information about our world to an unknown world and, presumably, were carefully chosen to reveal essential features about our civilization. A metal greeting card placed on spacecraft Pioneers 10 and II uses mathematical symbols to locate the earth, the sun and the solar system. Most of the card, however, features a prominent portrayal of a man and a woman, nude, done as a simple line drawing. The placement of the couple, alongside the mathematical diagram that illustrates the distances between parts of the galaxy, is such that the eye is drawn towards the male figure as the prominent or dominant one. To further encourage this impression, he is drawn facing and looking straight ahead, one arm raised (in greetings). She, meanwhile, already off to the side and with the abstract diagram drawing attention away from her, is positioned slightly turned towards the man, her face and eyes also turned towards him, and definitely not looking directly into whatever world faces her. This is reminiscent of the stereotypical politician-and-his-wife, minister-and-his-wife or professional-and-his-wife, and does not, in my view, provide an adequate model of balance, however much it mirrors our world.

"Balance" involves images that convey strength, independence, interdependence, complementarity and co-equality. The femi-
nine and masculine principles both can and do function independently of each other and, when they come together, together-yet-separately, the two-in-one complement each other in forming another larger whole, but they do not overpower each other. Neither principle exists essentially or primarily "for" the other but insofar as each one is for the other, they are equally for each other.

To return to the previous example and my own spiritual practice, I can now take up the inevitable question: does Vajrayana Buddhism actually speak of the feminine and masculine principles in this balanced way? I have not yet been able fully to answer that question, though my acquaintance to date with the teachings and practices has not presented anything that makes me want to end my exploration. I have also begun to feel that I am at last working with a tradition that does not use images of masculine and feminine principles in hierarchical or oppressive ways. Furthermore, the "edge" quality of not having definitive answers to my questions about the use of feminine and masculine principles in Vajrayana Buddhism seems to be a healthy insecurity, fundamental to practice and the effort to wake up.

A very important motif in Vajrayana Buddhism is the way in which experience is divided into complementary dualities associated with feminine and masculine principles. The basic pair is probably space and form, accommodation and specific definite action. emptiness and bliss or energy, or more classically put. Prajna and Upaya (discriminating awareness wisdom and skillful action or compassion) (Lief, 1982). In addition, many more esoteric pairs are found in the oral tradition-s-sun and moon, red and white, vowels and consonants, liquor and meat, ritual bell and sceptre, left and right, etc. Two things are striking about all these pairs. Clearly, they are dyadic unities, not hierarchic dualisms or monolithic entities. In addition, without the code of the oral tradition, relying only on conventional thinking, it would be hard to find a logic whereby one represents the feminine principle and the other the masculine. Space, accommodation, emptiness, and Prajna (discriminating awareness wisdom) constitute the feminine principle. They provide the opportunity for their counterparts to arise. Form arises out of emptiness, compassionate skillful activity out of wisdom, and bliss or energy out of accommodation. Without this feminine element the masculine one could not arise; together they form the enlightened world. So, transcendent Wisdom. Prajnaparamitaś literally "Mother of all the Buddhas" because Buddha activity arises out of, results from, and is born from Wisdom. Distinct yet together, they are enlightenment, transcending but not abolishing duality.
A feminist untrained in meditation might become upset with these associations, interpreting them as an indication that the feminine principle accommodates and enables the masculine, which is thought to be more important. She might be led to feel that once again the masculine uses the feminine. However, someone trained in meditation begins to understand and appreciate the significance of space, of background, of emptiness. She begins to know that it is literally true that action depends on space, that foreground depends on background. She also begins to realize that, if anything, action is the "easier" part; learning to recognize space, to do nothing, to develop discriminating awareness wisdom is the "harder" part of meditation training and enlightened activity. It is said that once unobstructed space-s-vision unclouded by conventionality and discursiveness-s-is developed, then appropriate action develops spontaneously and blissfully. On the other hand, though Wisdom provides the ground for Enlightened Activity, Enlightened Activity completes the dyadic unity. Without Enlightened Activity, Wisdom is sterile, possibly destructive. Space and activity are not being ranked; their temporal relationship, their complementarity and co-necessity are being recognized. Before there can be a child, there must be a mother.

But why is space feminine and activity masculine? Why not the other way around? And isn't that description similar to the Western "active and passive"? Anyone who meditates knows that space and passivity are not the same thing at all. In any case, space is highly positive in Buddhist thought whereas passivity is of questionable value in Western thought. Why do space and accommodation go with the feminine principle? Although the association seems intuitively correct to me, I do not think it occurs because a woman's psyche is necessarily more in tune with the feminine principle. Rather, I think it occurs for the same reasons that in the I Ching solid lines represent masculine and broken lines the feminine. The anatomy of sexuality and reproduction would make it difficult to reverse the symbolisms. However, in Vajrayana Buddhism this symbolism is not used to teach that "anatomy is destiny," limiting the individual female or male practitioner to experiencing or manifesting only one part of the dyadic unity.

Another important representation of the feminine and masculine principles in Vajrayana Buddhism involves the "mythological" realm of the dakas, dakinis, yidams, dharmapalas, etc. They are important in the sadhana practices of Vajrayana Buddhism, and are familiar to anyone knowledgeable about Tibetan art, since they are often portrayed on the thankas or in statue form. Not yet having been introduced to the oral traditions of most of these "mythological" figures. I do not have
the same personal experience with them that I do with the co-
emergent Mother Vajrayogini and the materials regarding the
basics of the feminine and masculine principles outlined above.
Nevertheless, because so many people look at and speculate
about these figures, I want to offer some preliminary com-
ments, addressing the themes of this article.

In the artwork portraying these figures, the balance between
feminine and masculine can be seen in the fact that all species of
beings in this "mythological" universe occur frequently in both
genders, unlike, for example, the inhabitants of many Western
mythological universes, both serious and popular. The dance
poses, ornaments, dress, implements, etc., of the males and
females are similar or identical. Both females and males are
often pictured alone, without a mate, and when they appear
singly, the females and males are identical in the strength,
energy, and attraction with which they are portrayed. These
beings also consort with each other, quite literally, and such
imagery is frequent. There are several typical poses, but all of
them involve a couple, seen from the female's back and the
male's front. Both faces are visible, by the device of having the
female's head flung back in the extreme.

For years, I have contemplated this image and wondered if it is
androcentric. Are we seeing a dyadic unity, or are we seeing
Him and His consort? This is a critical question. As partial
answer, I have tried to imagine other ways of portraying the
same image, with no success. Since, for the other meanings of
the image to be conveyed, the pose must be sexual, a simple
side-by-side front forward view would not work. A joined
sexual pose meant to be viewed from the side would not show
faces, which would lose full expression. A sexual pose viewed
from the side, but with both heads turned to face the viewer's
not much passion would be conveyed by that pose. Her front
and his back? - if he is taller he would hide her completely. The
only other option I call think of is the widely adopted Hindu
Tantra image of the female sitting on a prone male. But this
icon conveys, and is meant to convey, the passivity of the male
principle and the activity of the female principle, which is not
part of Buddhist Tantra. So, there may not be any other
options, and yet, it is not clear to me whether the classical image
is an androgynous or androcentric image. My suspicion that it
is slightly androcentric increases when he becomes multi-
headed, multi-armed, and multi-legged while she retains one
head, two arms, and two legs. I cannot recall any images in
which this situation is reversed. On the other hand, since he is
Skillful Means, Compassionate Activity, perhaps he needs as
many arms as possible, whereas Enabling Wisdom needs no
elaboration. Without the oral tradition, I remain only on the
"edge" of understanding. Looking at *dakas*, *dakinis* and *yidams* in art books is, as I already emphasized, a vicarious, exoteric relationship with these beings. One truly comes to know and to become one with them in doing *sadhana* practices. Since I know only a small portion of this oral tradition, I cannot present many generalizations.

Questions about how women and men actually do these practices can initiate our concluding reflections—questions of how to manifest this balance in the phenomenal world. In doing *sadhana* practice, I think the question of balance concerns, first, the ways in which male and female practitioners are taught to relate with these "mythic" beings. For the Vajrayogini *sadhana*, the instructions are identical for women and men. Both develop a deeper understanding of the feminine principle. I do not know much about the details of *sadhanas* involving a male *yidam*, or a couple, but both men and women are given both male and female *yidams*. Men who practice, for example, Vajrayogini *sadhana*, must learn to visualize themselves as female, and women learn to visualize themselves as male in *sadhanas* concerning male *yidams*. Both also learn to visualize the dyadic unity of the consort-couple—an intriguing proposition. In the not too distant future I hope to learn more about this type of *sadhana* practice. Though it is difficult to gain much specific information about how to do these practices, I have heard several important Karma Kagyu teachers emphasize that the practices are identical for both women and men and strive to develop "feminine" and "masculine" energy in both. The Dalai Lama also made a similar statement in a recent issue of this *Journal* (Komito, 1984),

Though the practices one does to develop, and the eventual enlightened manifestation of both principles are not different for women and men, still, as students-in-training, perhaps women and men respond differently to their *yidam* practices. I have not conducted any surveys on this question, and I believe it would be difficult to isolate differences based on gender from other factors, such as personality (one's Buddha-family in Vajrayana terminology"), experience, education, etc. However; I would like to offer some impressions from my own experience.

I know that for me it is deeply satisfying and confirming to do a practice focusing on this version of the feminine principle. It is both confirming and comforting to have this relationship with Vajrayogini. It is like remembering or meeting again one's true self. I do not know if this sense of solace and relief is intensified because of my personal experience of being a Western woman who grew up with no satisfying, strong and positive feminine
imagery. It should also be very clear that when I speak of such solace and comfort, I am not describing a cozy, comfortable situation. The energy of sadhana practice can be devastating and bleak, but filled with truth.

I also do not know if men experience the same solace in meeting Vajrayogini. Often it strikes me that for men there may be more of a shock, a discovery of something different, and a consequent passion toward her. Both responses would seem to have a deep impact on one's conduct in the phenomenal world. For me, the masculine principle becomes much more palatable and delightful when one is also working with a feminine principle, whereas things become sour when I am limited to working with only masculine imagery. For example, before I began to practice the Vajrayogini sadhana, sometimes when I did another sadhana by myself, I simply changed the "He's" to "She's" out of simple frustration and deprivation. Now I no longer feel any desire to do so. However, I want to be careful to clarify that even though I may find working with the feminine principle more comforting than a man may, that does not seem to be evidence for a claim that men are more in tune with the masculine principle and women the feminine principle. I do not feel that I manifest the feminine principle of space more than I manifest action, or that I have more sense of space than do men. I certainly would not look with favor upon a claim that I am, or will be less capable of, skillful action because that is connected with the masculine principle.

In short, I feel somewhat strongly that masculine and feminine principles quickly become oppressive when it is asserted that women are or should be more like the feminine principle than like the masculine principle, or should or do manifest the feminine principle more than men do. Manifesting balance in the phenomenal world, however, has to do with fostering the full development of both women and men, not with limiting them to mirroring half the picture.

NOTES


2 My dissertation, Exclusion and participation: The role of women in aboriginal Australian religion (unpublished), University of Chicago, 1975, the first


SSmithsonian, 1978, 9, p. 41, shows a photograph of the greeting cards.


"This traditional Tibetan teaching regarding basic psychological traits is unlike Western psychologies and very useful. See Trungpa, *Journey without goal* (pp. 77-85) and Trungpa, *Cutting through spiritual materialism* (Berkeley: Shambhala, 1971, P1>2),7-43), See also Thinley Norbu, *Magic dance: The display of the self-nature of the five wisdom dakinis.* (P.O. Box 146, New York, N.Y. 10002).

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