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Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire

One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one.
—Simone de Beauvoir

Sexually, "women" cannot be said to exist.
—Julia Kristeva

Woman does not have a sex.
—Luce Irigaray

The deployment of sexuality... established the notion of sex.
—Michel Foucault

The category of sex is the political category that has defined society as heterosexual.
—Monique Wittig

i. "Women" as the Subject of Feminism

For the most part, feminist theory has assumed that there is some existing identity, understood through the category of women, who not only initiates feminist interests and goals within discourse, but constitutes the subject for whom political representation is pursued. But politics and representation are controversial terms. On the one hand, representation serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects; on the other hand, representation is the narrative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women. For feminist theory, the development of a language that fully and adequately represents women has seemed necessary to foster the political visibility of women. This has seemed obviously important considering the pervasive cultural condition in which women's lives were either misrepresented or not represented at all.

Recently, this prevailing conception of the relation between feminist theory and politics has come under challenge from within feminist discourse. The very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms. There is a great deal of material that not only questions the viability of "the subject" as the ultimate candidate for representation or, indeed, liberation, but there is very little agreement after all as to what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women. The domains of political and linguistic "representation" set out in advance the criterion by which subjects themselves are formed, with the result that representation is exteded only to what can be acknowledged as a subject. In other words, the qualifica-
tions for being a subject must first be met before representation can be extended. Foucault points out that juridical systems of power produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent. 1 Juridical notions of power appear to regulate political life in purely negative terms—that is, through the limitation, prohibition, regulation, control and even "protection" of individuals related to that political structure through the contingent and retractable operation of choice. But the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures. If this analysis is right, then the juridical formation of language and politics that represents women as "the subject" of feminism is itself a discursive formation and effect of a given version of representational politics. And the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation. This becomes politically problematic if that system can be shown to produce gendered subjects along a differential axis of domination or to produce subjects who are presumed to be masculine. In such cases, an uncritical appeal to such a system for the emancipation of "women" will be clearly self-defeating.

The question of "the subject" is crucial for politics, and for feminist politics in particular, because juridical subjects are invariably produced through certain exclusionary practices that do not "show" once the juridical structure of politics has been established. In other words, the political construction of the subject proceeds with certain legitimating and exclusionary aims, and these political operations are effectively concealed and naturalized by a political analysis that takes juridical structures as their foundation. Juridical power inevitably "produces" what it claims merely to represent; hence, politics must be concerned with this dual function of power: the juridical and the productive. In effect, the law produces and then conceals the notion of "a subject before the law" in order to invoke that discursive formation as a naturalized foundational premise that subsequently legitimates that law's own regulatory hegemony. It is not enough to inquire into how women might become more fully represented in language and politics. Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of "women," the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought.

Indeed, the question of women as the subject of feminism raises the possibility that there may not be a subject who stands "before" the law, awaiting representation in or by the law. Perhaps the subject, as well as the invocation of a temporal "before," is constituted by the law as the fictive foundation of its own claim to legitimacy. The prevailing assumption of the ontological integrity of the subject before the law might be understood as the contemporary trace of the state of nature hypothesis, that foundationalist lable constitutive of the juridical structures of classical liberalism. The performative invocation of a nonhistorical "before" becomes the foundational premise that guarantees a presocial ontology of persons who freely consent to be governed and, thereby, constitute the legitimacy of the social contract.

Apart from the foundationalist fictions that support the notion of the subject, however, there is the political problem that feminism encounters in the assumption that the term women denotes a common identity. Rather than a stable signifier that commends the assent of those whom it purports to describe and represent, women, even in the plural, has become a troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause for anxiety. As Denise Riley's title suggests, Am I That Name? is a question produced by the very possibility of the name's multiple significations. If one "is" a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered "person" transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate our "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained.

The political assumption that there must be a universal basis for feminism, one which must be found in an identity assumed to exist cross-culturally, often accompanies the notion that the oppression of women has some singular form discernible in the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination. The notion of a universal patriarchy has been widely criticized in recent years for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists. Where those various contexts have been consulted within such theories, it has been to find "examples" or "illustrations" of a universal principle that is assumed from the start. That form of feminist theorizing has come under criticism for its efforts to colonize and appropriate non-Western cultures to support highly Western notions of oppression, but because they tend as well to construct a "Third World" or even an "Orient" in which gender oppression is subtly explained as symptomatic of an essential, non-Western barbarism. The urgency of feminism to
problems with the claim of Universal patriarchy: universal conception of “women”

establish a universal status for patriarchy in order to strengthen the appearance of feminism’s own claims to be representative has occasionally motivated the shortcut to a categorical or fictive universality of the structure of domination, held to produce women’s common subjugated experience.

Although the claim of universal patriarchy no longer enjoys the kind of credibility it once did, the notion of a generally shared conception of “women,” the corollary to that framework, has been much more difficult to displace. Certainly, there have been plenty of debates as to there somewhere among “women” that preexists this oppression, or do “women” have a bond by virtue of their oppression alone? Is there a specificity to women’s cultures that is independent of their subordination by hegemonic, masculinist cultures? Are the specificity and integrity of women’s cultural or linguistic practices always specified against and, hence, within the terms of some more dominant cultural formation? If there is a region of the “specifically feminine,” one that is both differentiated from the masculine as such and recognizable in its difference by an unmarked and, hence, presumed universality of “women”? The masculine/feminine binary constitutes not only the exclusive framework in which specificity can be recognized, but in every other way the “specificity” of the feminine is once again fully decontextualized and separated from analytically and politically from the constitution of class, race, ethnicity, and other axes of power relations that both constitute “identity” and make the singular notion of identity a misnomer.

My suggestion is that the presumed universality and unity of the subject of feminism is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions. Indeed, the premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to the category. These do not, the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction, even when the construction has been elaborated for emancipatory purposes. Indeed, the fragmentation within feminism and the paradoxical opposition to feminism recovered whom feminism claims to represent suggest the necessary limits of identity politics.

The suggestion that feminism can seek wider representation for a subject that it itself constructs has the ironic consequence that feminist goals risk failure by refusing to take account of the constitutive powers of their own representational claims. This problem is not ameliorated through an appeal to the category of women for merely “strategic” purposes, for strategies always have meanings that exceed the purposes for which they are intended. In this case, exclusion itself might qualify as such an unintended yet consequential meaning. By conforming to a requirement of representational politics that feminism anchor a stable subject, feminism thus opens itself to charges of gross misrepresentation.

Obviously, the political task is not to refuse representational politics—as if we could. The juridical structures of language and politics constitute the contemporary field of power, and there is no position outside this field, but only a critical genealogy of its own legitimating practices. As such, the critical point of departure is the historical present, as Marx put it. And a task assigned within that consituted frame, an critique of the categories of identity that consitutatory juridical structures explore, naturalize, and immobilize.

Perhaps there is an opportunity at this juncture of cultural politics, a period that some would call “postfeminist” or refitted from within a feminist perspective on the injunction to construct a subject of feminism. Within feminist political practice, a radical rethinking of the ontological constructions of identity appears to be necessary in order to formulate a representational politics that might revive feminism on other grounds. On the other hand, it may be time to entertain a radical critique that seeks to free feminist theory from the necessity of having to construct a single or sliding gender, and which is not securely founded by those identity positions or anti-identity positions that invariably eludes. Do the exclusionary practices that ground feminist theory in a notion of “women” paradoxically undermine feminist goals to extend its claims to “representation”?

Perhaps the problem is even more serious. Is the construction of the category of women as a coherent and stable subject an unwarranted stability and reluctance of gender relations? And is it not such a construction precisely contrary to feminist aims? To what extent does the category of women achieve stability and coherence only in the context of the hierarchical manner of gender so long as to be the foundational promise of feminism, perhaps a new sort of feminist politics is now desirable to contest the problem of recognition of gender and identity, one that will take the variable construction of identity as both a methodological and normative prerequisite, if not a political goal.

To trace the political operations that produce and conceal what qualifies as the juridical subject of feminism, the task of feminism genealogy of the category of women. In the course of this effort to question “women” as the subject of feminism, the usurious practice of the inscription of feminism as a representational politics. What sense does it make to extend representation to subjects who are constructed through...
the exclusion of those who fail to conform to unspoken normative requirements of the subject? What relations of domination and exclusion are inadvertently sustained when representation becomes the sole focus of politics? The identity of the feminist subject ought not to be the foundation of feminist politics, if the formation of the subject takes place within a field of power regularly buried through the assertion of that foundation. Perhaps, paradoxically, "representation" will be shown to make sense for feminism only when the subject of "women" is nowhere presented.

ii. The Compulsory Order of Sex/Gender/Desire

Although the unproblematic unity of "women" is often invoked to construct a solidarity of identity, a split is introduced in the feminist subject by the distinction between sex and gender. Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-determinant formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is the material result of gender as seemingly fixed as sex. The unity of the subject is thus already potentially contested by the distinction that permits of gender as a multiple interpretation of sex.

If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to the logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of "sex" will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that "women" will interpret only female bodies. Further, even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution (which will become a question), there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two. The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly rests the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifact, with the consequence that man and woman alike might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and femininity a male body as easily as a female one.

This radical splitting of the gendered subject poses yet another set of problems. Can we refer to a "given" sex or a "given" gender without first inquiring into how sex and/or gender is given, through what means? And what is "sex" anyway? Is it natural, anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal, and how is a feminist critic to assess the scientific discourses which purport to establish such "facts" for us? Does sex have a history? Does each sex have a different history, or is there a history of how the duality of sex was established, a genealogy that might expose the binary options as a variable construction? Are there ontologically natural facts of sex discursively produced by various scientific discourses in the service of other political and social interests? If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called "sex" is as culturally constructed as gender, indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.

It would make no sense, then, to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex, if sex itself is a gendered category. Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-existing sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which "sexed nature" or "a natural sex" is produced and established as "prediscriptive," prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts. This construction of "sex" as the radically unconstructed will concern us again in the discussion of Levi-Strauss and structuralism in chapter 2. At this juncture it is already clear that one way the internal stability and autonomy of sex is effectively located is by casting the duality of sex as a prediscriptive domain. This production of sex as the prediscriptive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designed by gender. How, then, does gender need to be reconstituted to encompass the power relations that produce the effect of a prediscriptive sex and so conceal that very operation of discursive production?

ii. Gender: The Circular Ruins of Contemporary Debate

Is there "a" gender which persons are said to have, or is it an essential attribute that a person is said to be, as implied in the question "What gender are you?"? When feminist theorists claim that gender is the cultural interpretation of sex or that gender is culturally constructed, what is the manner or mechanism of this construction of gender? Is constructed, could it be constructed differently, or does its constructedness imply some form of social determinism, foreclosing the possibility of agency and transformation? Does "construction" suggest that certain laws generate gender differences along universal axes of sexual difference? How and where does the construction of
gender take place? What sense can we make of a construction that cannot assume a human constructor prior to that construction? On some accounts, the notion that gender is constructed suggests a certain determinism of gender meanings inscribed on anatomically differentiated bodies, where those bodies are understood as passive recipients of an invariable cultural law. When the relevant "culture" that "constructs" gender is understood in terms of such a law or set of laws, then it seems that gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the biology-is-determinant formulation. In such a case, no biology, but culture, becomes destiny.

On the other hand, Simone de Beauvoir suggests in The Second Sex that "one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one." For Beauvoir, gender is "constructed," but implied in her formulation is an agent, a "narrator" who somehow takes on or appropriates that gender and could, in principle, take on some other gender. Is gender as variable and volitional as Beauvoir's account seems to suggest? Can "construction" in such a case be reduced to a form of choice? Beauvoir is clear that one "becomes" a woman, but always under a cultural compulsion to become one. And clearly, the compulsion does not come from "sex." There is nothing in her account that guarantees that the "one" who becomes a woman is necessarily female. If "the body is a situation," as she claims, there is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings; hence, sex could not qualify as a prediscursive anatomical facticity. Indeed, sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along.

The controversy over the meaning of construction appears to revolve around the conventional philosophical polarity between free will and determinism. As a consequence, one might reasonably suspect that some common linguistic restriction on thought both forms and limits the terms of the debate. Within those terms, "the body" appears to refer to a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which it is appropriate and interpretable that cultural meanings determine a cultural meaning for itself. In other cases, the body is figured as a more instrument or medium for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related. But "the body" itself is a construction, as are the myriad "bodies" that constitute the domain of gendered subjection. Bodies can be said to have a significant existence prior to the mark of their gender; the question that emerges: To what extent does the body come into being in and through the mark(s) of gender? Do we recognize the body no longer as a passive medium or instrument awaiting the enlivening capacity of a distinctly immaterial will?

Whether gender or sex is fixed or free is a function of a discourse which, it will be suggested, seeks to set certain limits to analysis or to safeguard certain tenets of humanism in an analysis of gender. The locus of utractability, whether in "sex" or "gender" or in the very meaning of "construction," provides a clue to what cultural possibilities can and cannot become mobilized through any further analysis. The limits of a prescriptive analysis of gender presuppose and preclude the possibilities of imaginable and realizable gender configurations within culture. This is not to say that any and all gendered possibilities are open, but that the boundaries of analysis suggest the limits of a discursively conditioned experience. These limits are always set within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality. Constraints is thus built into what that language constitutes as the imaginable domain of gender.

Although social scientists refer to gender as a "factor" or a "dimension" of an analysis, it is also applied to embodied persons as "a" "factor" of biological, linguistic, and cultural difference. In these latter cases, gender can be understood as a signification that an (already) sexually differentiated body assumes, but even then that signification exists only in relation to another, opposing signification. Some feminist theorists claim that sex is "sexist" indeed, a set of relations, and not an individual attribute. Others, following Beauvoir, would argue that only the feminine gender is marked, that the universal person and the masculine gender are cosubstantial, thereby defining women in terms of their sex and excluding men as the bearers of a body-transcendent universal personhood.

In a move that complicates the discussion further, Luce Irigaray argues that women constitute a paradigmatic opposition within the discourse of identity itself. Women are the "sex" which is not one. Within a language pervasively masculinist, a phallocentric language, women constitute the cultural meaning of itself. In other words, women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity. Within a language that rests on univocal signification, the female sex constitutes the uncontestable and undesignatable. In this sense, women are the sex which is not multiple. In opposition to Beauvoir, for whom women are designated as the Other, Irigaray argues that both the subject and the Other are masculine. Irigaray suggests that the subject and the Other are masculine. Irigaray suggests that the subject and the Other are masculine configurations of a closed phallocentric economy that achieves its totaling goal through the exclusion of the feminine altogether. For Beauvoir, women are the negative of men, the lack
against which masculine identity differentiates itself; for Irigaray, that particular-discursive constitutes a system that excludes an entirely different economy of signification. Women are not only represented, but falsely within the Saussurean frame of signifying-subject and signified—
Other, but the falsity of the signification points out the entire structure of representation as inadequate. The sex which is not one, then, provides a point of departure for a criticism of hegemonic Western representation and of the metaphysics of substance that structures the very notion of the subject.

What is the metaphysics of substance, and how does it inform thinking about the categories of sex? In the first instance, humanist conceptions of the subject tend to assume a substantive person who is the bearer of various essential and nonessential attributes. A humanist, for instance, might understand gender as an attribute of a person who is characterized essentially as a pregendered substance or “core,” called the person, denoting a universal capacity for reason, moral deliberations, or language. The universal conception of the person, however, is displaced as a point of departure for a social theory of gender by those historical and anthropological positions that understand gender as a relation among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts. This relational or contextual point of view sug-
eggests that what the person “is,” and, indeed, what gender “is,” is always relative to the constructed relations in which it is determined.

As a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations. Irigaray would maintain, however, that the feminine “sex” is a point of linguistic absence, the impossibility of a grammatically de-
defined substance, and, hence, the point of view that exposes that substance as an abiding and foundational illusion of a masculinist discourse. This absence is not marked as such within the masculine signifying economy—a conception that reverses Beauvoir’s argument (and Wittig’s) that the female sex is marked, while the male sex is not. For Irigaray, the female sex is not a “lack” or an “Other” that is immanently and negatively defines the subject in its masculinity. On the contrary, the female sex stimulates the very requirements of representation, for she is neither “Other” nor the “lack,” those categories remaining relative to the Saussurian subject, immanent to that phallocen-
tric scheme. Hence, for Irigaray, the feminine could never be the mark of a subject, as Beauvoir would suggest. Further, the feminine could not be theorized in terms of a determinate relation between the masculine and the feminine within any given discourse, for discourse is not a relevant notion here. Even in their variety, discourses constitute so many modalities of phallocentric language. The female sex is thus also the subject that is not one. The relation between sex and feminine cannot be represented in a signifying economy in which
the masculine constitutes the closed circle of signifier and signified. Paradoxically enough, Beauvoir predicted the impossibility in The Second Sex when she argued that men could not settle the question of women because they would then be acting as both judge and party to the case.19

The distinctions among the above positions are far from discrete; each of them can be understood to problematize the identity and meaning of both the “subject” and “gender” within the context of socially instituted gender asymmetry. The subjective position of woman in no sense exhausted by the alternatives suggested above. The problematic circularity of a feminist inquiry into gender is under-
stood by the presence of positions which, on the one hand, presume that gender is a secondary characteristic of persons and those who,
the other hand, argue that the very notion of the person, positioned within language as a “subject,” is a masculinist construction and an apparatus central to the cultural and semantic possibility of a feminine gender. The consequence of such sharp dis-
agreements about the meaning of gender (indeed, whether gender is the term to be argued about at all, or whether the discursive construc-
tion of sex is, indeed, more fundamental, or perhaps sex woman and/or men and man) establishes the need for a radical re-
thinking of the categories of identity within the context of relations of radical gender asymmetry.

For Beauvoir, the “subject” within the existential analytic of misogyny is always already masculine, conflated with the universal, differ-
entiating itself from a feminine “Other” outside the universalizing terms of personhood, hopelessly “particular,” embodied, enthroned to immanence. Although Beauvoir is often understood to be calling for the right of women, in effect, to become existential subjects and, therefore, to assume universality, her position also implies a fundamental critique of the very disembodi-
ment of the abstract masculine epistemological subject. That subject is an abstraction to the extent that it disavows the socially marked embodi-
ment and, further, projects that disavowed and dispersed embodiment on to the feminine sphere, effectively renaming the body as female. This association of the body with the female works along the logical relations of reciprocity whereby the female sex becomes re-
stricted to its body, and the male body, fully disavowed, becomes,
paradoxically, the incorporeal instrument of an ostensibly radical freedom. Beauvoir's analysis implicitly poses the question: Through what act of negation and disavowal does the masculine pose as a disembodied universality and the feminine get constructed as a disavowed corporeality? The dialectic of master-slave, here fully re-formulated within the nonreciprocal terms of gender asymmetry, presupposes what Irigaray will later describe as the masculine signifying economy that includes both the existential subject and the Other.

Beauvoir proposes that the female body ought to be the situation and instrumentality of women's freedom, not a defining and limiting essence.20 The theory of embodiment informing Beauvoir's analysis is clearly limited by the internalization of the Cartesian distinction between freedom and the body. Despite my own previous efforts to argue the contrary, it appears that Beauvoir maintains the mind/body dualism, even as she proposes a synthesis of those terms.21 The preservation of that very distinction can be read as symptomatic of the very phallocentrism that Beauvoir undermines. In the philosophical tradition that begins with Plato and continues through Descartes, Husserl, and Sartre, the ontological distinction between soul (consciousness, mind) and body invariably supports relations of political and psychic subordination and hierarchy. The mind not only subjugates the body, but occasionally entertains the fantasy of being an embodiment altogether. The cultural associations of mind with masculinity and body with femininity are well documented within the field of philosophy and feminism.22 As a result, any uncritical reproduction of the mind/body distinction ought to be rethought for the implicit gender hierarchy that the distinction has conventionally produced, maintained, and rationalized.

The discursive construction of "the body" and its separation from "freedom" is Beauvoir's failure to mark along the axis of gender the very mind/body distinction that is supposed to illuminate the persistence of gender asymmetry. Officially, Beauvoir contends that the female body is marked within masculinist discourse, whereby the masculine body, in its conflation with the universal, remains unmarked. Irigaray clearly suggests that both marker and marked are maintained within a masculinist mode of signification in which the female body is "marked off," as it were, from the domain of the signifiable. In post-Hegelian terms, she is "cancelled," but not preserved. On Irigaray's reading, Beauvoir's claim that woman is "sex" is reversed to mean that she is not the sex she is designated to be, but, rather, the masculine sex (encore and ett corps) parodying the mode of otherness. For Irigaray, that phallocentric mode of signifying the female sex perpetually reproduces abstractions of its own self-amplifying desire instead of a self-limiting linguistic gesture that gives utterance to difference to women. Phallocentricism offers a name to eclipse the feminine and take its place.

iv. Theorizing the Binary, the Unitary, and Beyond

Beauvoir and Irigaray clearly differ over the fundamental structures by which gender asymmetry is reproduced. Beauvoir turns to the failed reciprocity of an asymmetrical dialectic, while Irigaray suggests that the dialectic itself is the monologic elaboration of a masculinist signifying economy. Although Irigaray clearly identifies the otherside of feminist critique by exposing the epistemo-ontological, ontological, and logical structures of a masculinist signifying economy, the power of her analysis is undercut precisely by its globalizing reach. Is it possible to identify a monologic as well as a masculinist signifying economy that traverses the array of cultural and historical contexts in which sexual difference takes place? Is the failure to acknowledge the specific cultural operations of gender oppression within a univocal, epistemological imperialism, one that is not ameliorated by the simple elaboration of cultural differences as "examples" of the selfsame phallocentrism? The effort to include "Other" cultures as variegated amplifications of a global phallocentrism constitutes an appropriative act that risks a repetition of the self-aggrandizing gesture of phallocentrism, colonizing under the sign of the same those differences that might otherwise call that colonial context into question.

Feminism, critique might be to explore the totalling claims of a masculinist signifying economy, but also remain self-critical with respect to the underlying gestures of feminism. The effort to identify the binary as regular in form as a reverse-discourse that uncuriously mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms. That the tactic can operate in feminist and antifeminist contexts alike suggests that the colonizing gesture is not primarily or exclusively masculinist. It can operate to effect other relations of racial, class, and heteronormative subordination, to name but a few. And clearly, the variety of oppression, as I began to do, assumes its distance, sequential emergence along a horizontal axis that does not describe their convergences within the social field. A vertical model is similarly insufficient: depressions cannot be summarily ranked, causally related, distributed among planes of "originality" and "derivation."23 Indeed, the field of power structured in part by the imperializing gesture of dialectical appropriation exceeds and encompasses the axis of sexual difference,
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offering a mapping of intersecting differentials which cannot be
summation hierarchically either within the terms of phallogocentrism or any
other candidate for the position of "primary condition of oppression." Rather,
than an exclusive tactic of masculinist signifying economy, delineation
appropriation and suppression of the Other is one tactic
among many, deployed centrally but not exclusively in the service of
expanding or striking women, femininity, or shared structures of oppression or in the ostensibly transcen
dental structures of femininity, masculinity, sexuality, and écriture feminine.

The contemporary feminist debate over essentialism raises the ques
tion of the universality of female identity and masculinist oppression in
other ways. Universalist claims are based on a common or shared epistemological standpoint, understood as the articulated concept of feminin
ness or shared structures of oppression or in the ostensibly transcen
dental structures of femininity, masculinity, sexuality, and écriture feminine.
The opening discussion in this chapter argued that this globalising gesture has spawned a number of criticisms from women
who claim that the category of "women" is normative and exclusionary
and is invoked with the unmarked dimensions of class and racial privilege intact. In other words, the insistence upon the coherence and
unity of the category of women has effectively refuted the multiplicity of
social, cultural, and political intersections in which the concrete array of "women" are constructed.

Some efforts have been made to formulate coalitional political which
do not assume in advance what the content of "women" will be. Instead, they propose a set of dialogic encounters by which variously positioned women articulate separate identities within the framework
of an emergent coalition. Clearly, the value of coalitional politics is
not to be underestimated, but the very form of coalition, of an emerg
ing and unpredictable assemblage of positions, cannot be figured in
advance. Despite the dearly demarcated impasse that mobilises coalition building, the coalitional theorist can inadvertently reinseri
tox as sovereign of the process by trying to assert an ideal form for coalitional structures in advance, one that will effectively guarantee
unity as the outcome. Related efforts to determine what is and is not the true shape of a dialogue, what constitutes a "subject-position,
and the "unity" that can impede the self-shaping, and self-limiting dynamics of coalition.

The insistence on advance on coalitional "unity" as the goal assumes that solidarity, whatever its price, is a prerequisite for political action. But what sort of politics demands that kind of advance purchase on
unity? Perhaps a coalition needs to acknowledge its contradictions
and take action with those contradictions intact. Perhaps also part of what
dialogic understanding entails is the acceptance of divergence, breakage, splinter, and fragmentation as part of the often tortuous
process of democratization. The very notion of "dialogue" is culturally
specific and historically bound, and while one speaker may feel secure that a conversation is happening, another may be sure it is not.

The power relations that condition and limit the possibilities need first to be interrogated. Otherwise, the model of dialogue risks relapsing into a liberal model that assumes that speaking agents oc
cupy equal positions of power and speak the same presuppositions about what constitutes "agreement" and "unity" and, indeed, that those are the goals to be sought. It would be wrong to assume in advance that there is a category of "women" that simply needs to be
to be added in with various components of race, class, age, ethnicity, and

"unity" in the category of women is neither presupposed nor desired. Does "unity" set up an exclusionary norm of solidarity at the level of
identity that rules out the possibility of a set of actions which disrupt
the very borders of identity concepts, or which seek to accomplish precisely that disruption as an explicit political aim? Without the
presupposition or goal of "unity," which is, in other words, always
instilled at a conceptual level, provisional unities might emerge in the context of concrete actions that are not in the articulation of
identity. Without the compulsory expectation that feminist actions must be instigated from some stable, unified, and agreed upon identity, those actions might well start and
be more congruent to a number of "women" for whom the meaning of the category is permanently moot.

This anti-foundationalist approach to coalitional politics assumes that the political, whatever its price, is a prerequisite for political action. But what sort of politics demands that kind of advance purchase on
unity? Perhaps a coalition needs to acknowledge its contradictions
and take action with those contradictions intact. Perhaps also part of what
dialogic understanding entails is the acceptance of divergence, breakage, splinter, and fragmentation as part of the often tortuous

convene the theme or subject of politics, then identities can come into being and dissolve depending on the concrete practices that constitute them. Certain political practices institute identities on a contingent basis in order to accomplish whatever aims are in view. Traditional politics requires neither an expanded category of “women” nor an internally multiplicitous self that offers its complexity at once.

Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently delimited, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time. An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are altered inside and reinstituted according to the purposes at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits multiple convergences and divergences without obligation to a normative ideal of definitional closure.

v. Identity, Sex, and the Metaphysics of Substance

What can be meant by “identity,” then, and what grounds the presumption that identities are self-identical, persisting through time as the same, unified and internally coherent? More importantly, how do these assumptions inform the discourses on “gender identity”? It would be wrong to think that the discussion of “identity” ought to proceed prior to a discussion of gender identity for the simple reason that “persons” only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility. Sociological discussions have conventionally sought to understand the notion of the person in terms of an agency that claims ontological priority to the various roles and functions through which it assumes social visibility and meaning. Within philosophical discourse itself, the notion of “the person” has received analytic elaboration on the assumption that whatever social context the person is “in” remains somehow externally related to the definitional structure of personhood, be that consciousness, the capacity for language, or moral deliberation. Although that literature is not examined here, one premise of such inquiries is the focus of critical exploration and inversion. Whereas the question of what constitutes “personal identity” within philosophical accounts almost always centers on the question of what internal feature of the person establishes the community or self-identity of the person through time, the question here will be: To what extent do regulatory practices of gender formation and division constitute identity, the internal coherence of the subject, indeed, the self-identical status of the person? To what extent is “identity” a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience? And how do the regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity? In other words, the “coherence” and “continuity” of “the person” are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but rather socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility, much as “identity” is assured through the web of social concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of “the person” is called into question by the cultural emergence of those “incoherent” or “discontinuous” gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined.

Intelligible gender are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and the social concepts of sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire. In other words, the specter of discontinuity and incoherence themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of coherence and coherence, are continually produced and reproduced by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted gender, and the expression or effect of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual pleasure.

The notion that there might be a “truth” of sex, as Foucault ironically terms it, is produced precisely through the regulatory practices that generate coherent identities through the matrix of coherent gender norms. The heterosexuation of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between “masculine” and “masculine,” where these are understood as expressive attributes of “male” and “female.” The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of “identities” cannot “exist”—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which practices of desire do not “follow” from either sex or gender. “Follow” in this context is a political relation of entailment instituted by the cultural laws that establish and regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality. Indeed, they are precisely because certain kinds of “gender identities” fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain. Their persistence and proliferation, however, provide critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory areas of that domain of intelligibility and, hence, to open up within the very terms of that matrix of intelligibility: rival and transformative matrices of gender disorder.

Before such disordering practices are considered, however, it seems crucial to understand the “matrix of intelligibility.” Is it singular? Of what is it composite? What is the peculiar alliance presumed to exist
between a system of compulsory heterosexuality and the discursive categories that establish the identity concepts of sex? If "identity" is an effect of discursive practices, to what extent is gender identity, constituted as a relationship among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire, the effect of a regulatory practice that can be identified as compulsory heterosexuality? Would that explanation return us to yet another reifying framework in which compulsory heterosexuality no longer takes the place of phallocentrism as the nonnormative case of gender oppression?

Within the spectrum of French feminist and poststructuralist theory, very different regimes of power are understood to produce identity concepts of sex. Consider the divergence between those positions, such as Irigaray's, that claim there is only one sex, the masculine, that elaborates itself through the production of the "Other" and those positions, Foucault's, for instance, that assume that the category of sex, whether masculine or feminine, is a production of a diffuse regulatory economy of sexuality. Consider also Wittig's argument that the category of sex is, under the conditions of compulsory heterosexuality, always feminine (the masculine remaining unmarked and, hence, synonymous with the "neutral"). Wittig conceives, however paradoxically, with Foucault in claiming that the category of sex would itself disappear and, indeed, dissipate through the disruption and displacement of heterosexual hegemony.

The various explanatory models offered here suggest the very different ways in which the category of sex is understood depending on how the field of power is articulated. Is it possible to maintain the complexity of these fields of power and think through their productive capacities together? On the one hand, Irigaray's theory of sexual difference suggests that women can never be understood on the model of a "subject" within the conventional representational systems of Western culture precisely because they constitute the fetish of representation and, hence, the unrepresentable as such. Women can never be "he," according to this ontology of substances, precisely because they are the relation of difference, the excluded, by which that domain marks itself off. Women are also a "difference" that cannot be understood as the simple negation or "Other" of the already-masculine subject. As discussed earlier, they are neither the subject nor its Other, but a difference from the economy of binary opposition, itself a ruse for a monological elaboration of the masculine.

Central to each of these views, however, is the notion that sex appears within hegemonic language as a substance, as, metaphorically speaking, a self-identical being. This appearance is achieved through a performative twist of language and discourse that conceals the fact that "being" a sex or a gender is fundamentally impossible. For Irigaray, grammar can never be a true index of gender relations precisely because it supports the substantial model of gender as a binary relation between two positive and representable terms. In Irigaray's view, the substantive grammar of gender, which assumes men and women as well-gendered individuals, is an example of a binary that effectively masks the univocal and hegemonic discourse of the masculine, phallocentrism, silencing the feminine as a site of subjectivity. For Foucault, the substantive grammar of sex imposes an artificial binary relation between the sexes, as well as an artificial internal coherence within each term of that binary. The binary regulation of sexuality suppresses the subversive multiplicity of a sexuality that disrupts heterosexual, reproductive, and medical/historical hegemonies.

For Wittig, the binary restriction on sex serves the reproductive uses of a system of compulsory heterosexuality; occasionally, she claims that the overthrow of compulsory heterosexuality will inaugurate a true humanism of "the person" freed from the shackles of sex. In other contexts, she suggests that the profusion and diffusion of a non-phallocentric erotic economy will dissipate the illusions of sex, gender, and identity. As yet other textual moments it seems that "the lesbian" emerges as a third gender that promises to transcended the binary restriction on sex imposed by the system of compulsory heterosexuality. In her defense of the "cognitive subject," Wittig appears to have no metaphysical quarrel with hegemonic modes of signification or representation; indeed, the subject, with its attribute of self-determination, appears to be the rehabilitation of the agent of existential choice under the name of the lesbian: "the advent of individual subject demands first destroying the categories of sex. . . . the lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex." She does not criticize the "subject" as invariably masculine according to the rules of an inevitably patriarchal Symbolic, but proposes in its place the equivalent of a lesbian subject as language-user.

The identification of women with "sex," for Beauvoir as for Wittig, is a conflation of the category of women with the ostensibly sexualized features of their bodies and, hence, a refusal to grant freedom and autonomy to women as it is purportedly enjoyed by men. Thus, the destruction of the category of sex would be the destruction of an attribute, sex, that has, through a metaphorical gesture (asymptotic) come to take the place of the person, the self-determining subject. In other words, only men are "persons" and there is no gender for the feminine.
Gender is the linguistic index of the political opposition between the sexes. Gender is used here in the singular because indeed there are not two genders. There is only one: the feminine, the "masculine," not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine, but the general.  

Hence, Wittig calls for the destruction of "sex" so that women can assume the status of a universal subject. On the way toward that destruction, "women" must assume both a particular and a universal point of view.  

As a subject who can realize concrete universality through freedom, Wittig's lesbian confirms rather than contests the normative promise of humanist ideals premised on the metaphysics of substance. In this respect, Wittig is distinguished from Frigay, not only in terms of the now familiar oppositions between essentialism and materialism, but in terms of the adherence to a metaphysics of substance that confirms the normative model of humanism, as the framework for feminism. Where it seems that Wittig has subscribed to a radical project of lesbian emancipation and enforced a distinction between "lesbian" and "woman," she does this through the defense of the pregendered "person," characterized as freedom. This move not only confirms the prescandal status of human freedom, but subscribes to that metaphysics of substance that is responsible for the production and naturalization of the category of sex itself.  

The metaphysics of substance is a phrase that is associated with Nietzsche within the contemporary criticism of philosophical discourse. In a commentary on Nietzsche, Michele Haar argues that a number of philosophical ontologies have been trapped within certain illusions of "being" and "substance" that are fostered by the belief that the grammatical formulation of subject and predicate reflects the prior ontological reality of substance and attribute. These constructs, argues Haar, constitute the artificial philosophical means by which simplicity, order, and identity are effectively instituted. In no sense, however, do they reveal or represent some true order of things. For our purposes, this Nietzschean criticism becomes instructive when it is applied to the psychological categories that govern much popular and theoretical thinking about gender identity. According to Haar, the critique of the metaphysics of substance implies a critique of the very notion of the psychological person as a substantive thing:  

The destruction of logic by means of its genealogy brings with it as well the ruin of the psychological categories founded upon this logic. All psychopolitical categories (the ego, the individual, the person) derive from the illusion of substantial identity. But this illusion goes back basically to a superstition that deceives not only common sense but also philosophers—namely, that belief in language and, most precisely, in the truth of grammatical categories. It was grammar (the structure of subject and predicate) that inspired Descartes' certainty that "I" is the subject of "thinking," whereas it is rather thoughts that come to "me," at bottom, faith in grammar simply confers the will to be the "cause" of one's thoughts. The subject, the self, the individual, are just so many false concepts, since they transform into substances fictitious entities having at the start only a linguistic reality.  

Wittig provides an alternative critique by showing that persons cannot be satisfied within language without the mark of gender. She provides a political analysis of the grammar of gender in French. According to Wittig, gender not only designates persons, "qualities," as it were, but constitutes a conceptual epistemology by which binary gender is universalized. Although Frege gives gender to all sorts of nouns other than persons, Wittig argues that her analysis has consequences for English as well. At the outset of "The Mark of Gender" (1984), she writes:  

The mark of gender, according to grammarians, concerns substances. They talk about it in terms of function. If they question its meaning, they may ask about it, calling gender a "fictive sex." . . . as far as the categories of the persons are concerned, both [English and French] are bearers of gender to the same extent. Both indeed give way to a primitive onomotopoeic concept that enforces in language a division of beings into sexes. . . . As an onomotopoeic concept that deals with the nature of being, along with a whole nebula of other primitive concepts belonging to the same line of thought, gender seems to belong primarily to philosophy.  

For gender to "belong to philosophy," it is, for Wittig, to belong to "that body of self-evident concepts without which philosophers believe that they cannot develop a line of reasoning and which for them go without saying, for they exist prior to any thought, any social order," in nature.  

Wittig's view is corroborated by that popular discourse on gender identity that uncritically employs the infrastructural attribution of "being" to genders and to "sexualities." The unproblematic claim to "be a woman and be a homosexual would be symptomatic of that metaphysics of gender substance. In the case of both "men" and "women," this claim tends to subsume the person under that of identity and to lead to the conclusion that a person is a gender and is one in virtue of his or her sex, psychic sense of self, and
is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual-desire. The act of differentiating the two oppositional moments of the binary results in a consolidation of each term, the respective internal coherence of sex, gender, and desire.

The strategic displacement of that binary relation and the metaphysics of substance on which it relies presuppose that the categories of female and male, woman and man, are similarly produced within the binary frame. Foucault implicitly subscribes to such an explanation. In the closing chapter of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, in his brief but significant introduction to *Herculine Barbin, Being the Recently Discovered Journals of a Nineteenth-Century Hermaphrodite*, Foucault suggests that the category of sex, prior to any categorization of sexual difference, is itself constructed through a historically specific mode of sexuality. The tactical production of the discrete and binary categorization of sex conceals the strategic aim of this very apparatus of production by positing sex as "a cause" of sexual experience, behavior, and desire. Foucault's genealogical inquiry exposes this ostensible "cause" as an "effect," the production of a given regime of sexuality that seeks to regulate sexual experience by limiting the discrete categories of sex as foundational and causal functions within any discursive account of sexuality.

Foucault's introduction to the journals of the hermaphrodite, Herculine Barbin, suggests that the genealogical critique of these reified categories of sex is the inadvertent consequence of sexual practices that cannot be accounted for within the medico-scientific discourse of a naturalized heterosexuality. Herculine is not an "identity," but the sexual impossibility of an identity. Although male and female anatomical elements are jointly distributed and on this body, that is not the true source of scandal. The linguistic conventions that produce intelligible gendered selves find their limit in Herculine precisely because she/he occasions a conversation and disorganization of the rules that govern sex/gender/desire. Herculine deplots and redistributes the terms of a binary system, but that very redistribution disrupts and prefigures those terms outside the binary itself. According to Foucault, Herculine is not categorizable within the gender binary as it stands; the disconcerting convergence of heterosexuality and homosexuality in her/his person are only occasioned, but never caused, by her/his anatomical discontinuity. Foucault's appropriation of Herculine is suspect, but his analysis implies the interesting belief that sexual heteronormativity (paradoxically foreclosed by a naturalized "hetero"-sexuality) implies a critique of the metaphysics of substance.
as it informs the identitarian categories of sex. Foucault imagines Hercule's experience as "a world of pleasures in which grins hang about without the cat." Smiles, happenings, pleasures, and desires are figured here as qualities without an abiding substance to which they are said to adhere. As free-floating attributes, they suggest the possibility of a gendered experience that cannot be grasped through the substantiating and hierarchizing grammar of nouns (res extensa) and adjectives (attributes, essential and accidental). Through his cur- sory reading of Hercule, Foucault proposes an ontology of accidental attributes that exposes the postulation of identity as a culturally restricted principle of order and hierarchy, a regulatory fiction.

If it is possible to speak of a "man" with a masculine attribute and to understand that attribute as a happy but accidental feature of that man, then it is also possible to speak of a "man" with a feminine attribute, whatever that is, but still to maintain the integrity of the genders. But once we dispense with the priority of "man" and "woman" as abiding substances, then it is no longer possible to subordinate dissonant gendered features as so many secondary and accidental characteristics of a gender ontology that is fundamentally intact. If the notion of an abiding substance is a fictive construction produced through the compulsory ordering of attributes into coherent gender sequences, then it seems that gender as substance, the viability of man and woman as nouns, is called into question by the dissonant play of attributes that fail to conform to sequential or causal models of intelligibility.

The appearance of an abiding substance or gendered self, what the psychiatrist Robert Stoller refers to as a "gender core," is thus produced by the regulation of attributes along culturally established lines of coherence. As a result, the exposure of this fictive production is conditioned on the possibility of attributes that resist assimilation into the ready made framework of primary nouns and subordinate adjectives. It is of course always possible to argue that dissonant adjectives work retroactively to redefine the substantive identities they are said to modify and, hence, to expand the substantive categories of genders to include possibilities that they previously excluded. But if these substances are nothing other than the coherences contingently created through the regulation of attributes, it would seem that the ontology of substances itself is not only an artificial effect, but essentially superfluous.

In this sense, gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse

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vi. Language, Power, and the Strategies of Displacement

A great deal of feminist theory and literature has nevertheless assumed that there is a "doer" behind the deed. Without an agent, it is argued, there can be no agency and hence no potential to initiate a transformation of relations of domination within society. Wittig's radical feminist theory occupies an ambiguous position within the continuum of theories on the question of the subject. On the one hand, Wittig appears to dispute the metaphysics of substance, but on the other hand, she retains the human subject, the individual, as the metaphysical locus of agency. While Wittig's humanism clearly presupposes that there is a doer behind the deed, her theory nevertheless delineates the performative construction of gender within the material practices of culture, disputing the temporality of those explanations that would confuse "cause" with "result." In a phrase that suggests the intertextual space that links Wittig with Foucault (and reveals the traces of the Marxist notion of reification in both of their theories), she writes:

A materialist feminist approach shows that what we take for the cause or origin of oppression is in fact only the mark imposed by the oppressor; the "myth of woman," plus its material effects and manifestations in the appropriated consciousness and bodies of women. Thus, this mark does not preexist oppression. Sex is taken as an "immediate given," a "sensible given," "physical features," belonging to a natural order. But what we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction, an "imaginary formation." Because this production of "nature" operates in accord with the dictates of compulsory heterosexuality, the emergence of homosexual
desire, in her view, transcends the categories of sex: "If desire could liberate itself, it would have nothing to do with the preliminary marking by sexes."

Wittig refers to "sex" as a mark that is somehow applied by an institutionalized heterosexuality, a mark that can be erased or obfuscated through practices that effectively contest that institution. Her view, of course, differs radically from Irigaray's. The latter would understand the "mark" of gender to be part of the hegemonic signifying economy that structures through the self-elaborating, replicating mechanisms of specularization that have virtually determined the field of ontology within the Western philosophical tradition. For Wittig, language is an instrument or tool that is in no way misogynist in its structures, but only in its applications. For Irigaray, the possibility of another language or signifying economy is the only chance at escaping the "mark" of gender, which, for the feminine, is nothing but the phallocentric erasure of the female sex. Whereas Irigaray seeks to expose the ostensibly "binary" relation between the sexes as a masculinist ruse that excludes the feminine altogether, Wittig argues that position: like Irigaray she reconstitutes the binary between masculine and feminine and recontextualizes a mythic notion of the feminine. Clearly, drawing on Beauvoir's critique of the myth of the feminine in *The Second Sex*, Wittig asserts, "there is no ‘feminine writing.’"

Wittig is clearly attuned to the power of language to subordinate and exclude women. As a materialist, however, she considers language to be "another order of materiality," an institution that can be radically transformed. Language ranks among the concrete and contingent practices and institutions maintained by the choices of individuals and, hence, weakened by the collective actions of choosing individuals. The linguistic fiction of "sex," she argues, is a category produced and circulated by the system of compulsory heterosexuality in an effort to restrict the production of identities along the axis of heterosexual desire. In some of her work, both male and female homosexuality, as well as other positions independent of the heterosexual contract, provide the occasion either for the overthrow or the proliferation of the category of sex. In *The Lesbian Body* and elsewhere, however, Wittig appears to take issue with genetically organized sexuality per se and to call for an alternative economy of pleasures which would both contest the construction of female subordination by marking women's supposedly distinctive reproductive function. Here the proliferation of pleasures outside the reproductive economy suggests both a specifically feminine form of erotic diffusion, understood as a counterstrategy to the reproductive construction of genitality. In a sense, *The Lesbian Body* can be understood,

for Wittig, as an "inverted" reading of Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in which he argues for the developmental superiority of genital sexuality over and against the lesser restricted and more diffuse infantile sexuality. Only the "invert," the medical classification invoked by Freud for "the homosexual," fails to "achieve" the genital norm. In waging a political critique against genitality, Wittig appears to deploy "inversion" as a critical reading practice, valorising precisely those features of an undeveloped economy of the feminine that are标志ized by Freud and effectively inaugurating a "post-genital politics."

Indeed, the notion of development can be read only as normalization within the heterosexual matrix. And yet, is this the only reading of Freud possible? And to what extent is Wittig's practice of "inversion" committed to the very model of normalization that she seeks to dismantle? In other words, if the model of a more diffuse and antigelital sexuality serves as the singular, oppositional alternative to the hegemonic structure of sexuality, to what extent is that binary relation freed to reproduce itself endlessly? What possibility exists for the disruption of the oppositional binary itself?

Wittig's oppositional relationship to psychoanalysis produces the unexpected consequence that her theory presumes precisely that psychoanalytic theory of development, now fully "invented," that she seeks to overcome. Polysemous perversity, assumed to exist prior to the marking by sex, is valorised as the telos of human sexuality. One possible feminist psychoanalytic response to Wittig might argue that she both undertheorizes and overestimates the meaning and function of language in which "the mark of gender" occurs. She understands that marking praxis as contingent, radically variable, and even dispensable. The status of a primary prohibition in Lacanian theory operates more forcefully and less contingently than the notion of a restrictive practice in Foucault or a materialist account of a system of heterosexist oppression in Wittig.

In Lacan, as in Irigaray's post-Lacanian reformulation of Freud, sexual difference is not a simple binary that retains the metaphysics of substance as its foundation. The masculine "subject" is a fictive construction produced by the law that prohibits incest and forces an infinite displacement of a heterosexualizing desire. The feminine is never a mark of the subject; the feminine could not be an "attribute" of a gender. Rather, the feminine is the signification of lack, symbolized by the Symbolic, a set of determinating linguistic rules that effectively create sexual difference. The masculine linguistic position undergoes individuation and heterosexualization required by the founding prohibitions of the Symbolic law, the law of the Father. The incest taboo that bars the son from the mother and
illusion of substance—within the matrix of normative gender relations. In her existential-materialist mode, Wittig presumes the subject, the person, to have a presocial and pregendered integrity. On the other hand, "the paternal Law" in Lacan, as well as the monologic mastery of phallocentrism in Irigaray, bear the mark of a monothestic singularity that is perhaps less unitary and culturally universal than the guiding structuralist assumptions of the account presume.

But the queer also turns to the articulation of a temporal trope of a subsersive sexuality that flourishes prior to the imposition of a law, after its overthrow, or during its reign as a constant challenge to its authority. Here it seems wise to reinvoke Foucault who, in claiming that sexuality and power are coextensive, implicitly refuses the postulation of a subsersive or emancipatory sexuality which could be free of the law. We can press the argument further by pointing out that "the before" of the law and "the after" are discursively and performatively instituted modes of temporality that are invoked within the purview of a normative framework which asserts that subversion, destabilization, or displacement requires a sexuality that somehow escapes the hegemonic prohibitions on sex. For Foucault, those prohibitions are invariably and inadvertently productive in the sense that "the subject" who is supposed to be founded and produced in and through those prohibitions does not have access to a sexuality that is in some sense "outside," "before," or "after" power itself. Power, rather than the law, encompasses both the juridical (prohibitive and regulatory) and the productive (inadvertently generative) functions of differential relations. Hence, the sexuality that emerges within the matrix of power relations is not a simple replication or copy of the law itself, a uniform repetition of a masculinist economy of identity. The productions surgery, from their original purposes and inadvertently mobilize possibilities of "subjects" that do not merely exceed the bounds of cultural intelligibility, but effectively expand the boundaries of what is, in fact, culturally intelligible.

The feminist norm of a postgender sexuality became the object of significant criticism from feminist theorists of sexuality, some of whom have sought a specifically feminist and/or lesbian appropriation of Foucault. This utopian notion of a sexuality freed from heterosexual constructs, a sexuality beyond "sex," failed to acknowledge the ways in which power relations contribute to a sexuality for women even within the terms of a "liberated" heterosexuality or lesbianism. The same criticism is waged against the notion of a specifically feminine sexual pleasure that is radically differentiated from phallic sexuality. Irigaray's occasional efforts to derive a specific feminine sexuality from a specific female anatomy have been the focus...
of anti-essentialist arguments for some time. The return to biology as the ground of a specific feminine sexuality or meaning seems to defeat the feminist premise that biology is not destiny. But whether feminine sexuality is radicalized from a phallic organization of sexuality remains problematic. Women who fail either to recognize that sexuality as their own and understand their sexuality as partially constructed within the terms of the phallic economy are potentially written off within the terms of that theory as 'male-identified' or 'unenlightened.' Indeed, it is often unclear within Frigay's text whether sexuality is culturally constructed, or whether it is only culturally constructed within the terms of the phallic. In other words, is specifically feminine pleasure "outside" of culture or is feminism an analytical problem? If so, what use is such a notion for negotiating the contemporary struggles of sexuality within the terms of its construction? The pro-sexuality movement within feminism and feminist practice has effectively argued that sexuality is always constructed within the terms of discourse and power, where power is partially understood in terms of heterosexual and phallic cultural conventions. The emergence of a sexuality constructed (not determined) in these terms within lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual contexts is, therefore, not a sign of a masculine identification in some reductive sense. It is not the failed project of criticizing phallocentric hegemony, as if a positive critique could effectively undo the cultural construction of the feminist critic's sexuality. If sexuality is culturally constructed within existing power relations, then the postulation of a normative sexuality that is "before," "outside," or "beyond" power is a cultural impossibility and a politically unworkable dream. One that postpones the concrete and contemporary task of rebuilding alternative possibilities for sexuality and identity within the terms of power itself. This critical task promises, of course, that to operate within the matrix of power is not the same as to replicate uncritically relations of domination. It offers the possibility of a reparation of the law which is not its own constituencies, but is displacement. In the place of a "male-identified" sexuality in which "male" serves as the cause and irreducible meaning of that sexuality, we might develop a notion of sexuality constructed in terms of phallic relations of power that are reframed through the phallicism precisely through the subversive operation of 'identity formation' that are, within the power field of sexuality, inevitable. If "identity formations," following Jacqueline Rose, can be exposed as phallicistically structured, then it may be possible to enact an identification that displays its phallic structure. If there is no radical repudiation of a culturally constructed sexuality, what is left is the question of how to acknowledge and "do" the construction one is inevitably in. Are there forms of repetition that do not constitute a simple reproduction, but rather, consolidation of the law (the ana-archonotic notion of "male identification" that ought to be discarded from a feminist vocabulary)? What possibilities of gender configurations exist among the various emergent and omnously convergent matrices of cultural intelligibility that govern gendered life? Within the terms of feminist sexual theory, it is clear that the presence of power dynamics within sexual relations is already the consolidation or augmentation of a heterosexual or phallocentric power regime. The "presence" of so-called heterosexual conventions within homosexual contexts as well as the proliferation of specifically gay discourses of sexual difference, as in the 'butch' and 'femme' as historical identities of sexual style, cannot be explained as chimerical representations of originally heterosexual identities. Nor can they be understood as the passive insistent of heterosexual and sex constructs within gay sexuality and identity. The repetitivity of heterosexual conventions within sexual culture: both gay and straight may well be the inevitable use of the dematerialization and mobilization of gender categories. The repetition of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called "heterosexual" original. This is gay and straight and not as copy to original. But, rather, as copy to copy. The parodic hetrometry of the "original," discussed in the final section of chapter 3 of this text, reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the idea of the natural and the original. Even if heterosexuals circulate as the available sites of power/discourse from which to do gender or all the question remains: What possibilities of reconfiguration exist? Which possibilities of doing gender repeat and displace through hyperbole, dissolution, internal confusion, and proliferation the very constructs by which they are mobilized? Consider not only that the ambiguities and incoherences within and among heterosexual, homosexual, and transgendered identities are suppressed and rediscerned within the relational framework of the disjunctive and asymmetrical binary of masculine/feminine, but that these cultural configurations of gender confusion operate as sites for intervention, exposure, and redistribution of the possibilities of our words, the "unity" of gender is the effect of a regulatory practice that seeks to render gender identity uniform through a compulsory heterogenderisation. The issue of this practice is, through an explicitly patriarchal apparatus of production, to restrict the relative meanings of "hetero-"
sexuality," "homosexuality," and "heterosexuality" as well as the subversive sites of their convergence and resignification. That the power regimes of heterosexism and phallogocentrism seek to augment themselves through a constant repetition of their logic, their metaphysics, and their naturalized ontologies does not imply that repetition itself ought to be stopped—as if it could be. If repetition is bound to persist as the mechanism of the cultural reproduction of identities, then the crucial question emerges: What kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?

If there is no recourse to a "person," a "sex," or a "sexuality" that escapes the matrix of power and discursive relations that effectively produce and regulate the intelligibility of those concepts for us, what constitutes the possibility of effective inversion, subversion, or displacement within the terms of a constructed identity? What possibilities exist by virtue of the constructed character of sex and gender? Whereas Foucault is ambiguous about the precise character of the "regulatory practices" that produce the category of sex, and Wittig appears to invest the full responsibility of the construction of sexual reproduction and its instrument, compulsory heterosexuality, yet other discourses converge to produce this categorial fiction for reasons not always clear or consistent with one another. The power relations that distort the biological sciences are not easily reduced, and the medical alliance emerging in nineteenth-century Europe has spawned categories of sexology that could not be anticipated in advance. The very complexity of the discursive map that constructs gender appears to hold out the promise of an inadvertent and generative convergence of those discursive and regulatory structures. If the regulatory fictions of sex and gender are themselves multiply contested sites of meaning, then the very multiplicity of their construction holds out the possibility of a disruption of their universal posturing.

Clearly this project does not propose to lay out within traditional philosophical terms an ontology of gender whereby the meaning of being a woman or man is elucidated within the terms of phenomenology. The line of effect, an object of a genealogical investigation that maps out the political parameters of its construction in the mode of ontology. To claim that gender is constructed is not to assert its illusoric or artificiality, but rather to question the role within a binary that countersposes the "real" and the "authentic" as oppositional. As a genealogy of gender ontology, this inquiry seeks to understand the discursive production of the plausibility of that binary relation and to suggest that certain cultural configurations of gender take the place of "the real" and consolidate and augment their hegemony through that fictitious self-naturalization. If there is something right in Foucault's claim that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman, it follows that woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a construction that cannot rightfully be said to disappear or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification. Even when gender seems to conceal into the most refined forms, the "concealing" itself is an insistent and insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means. It is, for Beauvoir, never possible finally to become a "woman," as there were always logics that govern the process of acculturation and construction. Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that conceal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender. To expose the constitutive acts that create the appearance of a naturalistic necessity, a more which has been a part of cultural critique at least since Marx, is a task that now takes on the added burden of showing how the very notion of the subject, intelligible only through its appearance as gendered, admits of possibilities that have been forcibly foreclosed by the various restrictions of gender that have constituted its contingent ontologies.

The following chapter investigates some aspects of the psychoanalytic structuralist account of difference and the construction of sexuality with respect to its power to contest the regulatory regimes outlined here as well as its role in uncritically reproducing those regimes. The universality of sex, the internal coherence of gender, and the binary framework for both sex and gender are considered throughout as regulatory fictions that consolidate and naturalize the convergent power regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression. The final chapter considers the very notion of the "body," on a real surface awaiting signification, but as a set of boundaries, individual and social, politically signified and maintained. No longer believable as an interior "truth" of dispositions and identity, sex will be shown to be a performative enactment, where those terms are understood to reside within a one that, released from its naturalized interiority and surface, can occasion the parodic proliferation and subversive play of gendered meanings. This text continues, then, as an effort to think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and refuted
1. Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire

1. See Michel Foucault, “Right of Death and Power over Life,” in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980), originally published as *Histoire de la sexualité 1: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978). In that initial chapter, Foucault discusses the relation between the juridical and productive law. His notion of the productivity of the law is clearly derived from Nietzsche, although not identical with Nietzsche’s will-to-power. The use of Foucault’s notion of productive power is not meant as a simple-minded “application” of Foucault to gender issues. As I have in chapter 3, section ii., “Foucault, Herculane, and the Politics of Sexual Discontinuity,” the consideration of sexual difference within the terms of Foucault’s own work reveals central contradictions in his theory. His view of the body also comes under criticism in the final chapter.


5. I am reminded of the ambiguity inherent in Nancy Cott’s title, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). She argues that the early-twentieth-century U.S. feminist movement sought to “ground” itself in a program that eventually “grounded” that movement. Her historical thesis implicitly raises the question of whether uncrsitically accepted foundations operate like the “return of the repressed”; based on exclusionary practices, the stable political identities that found political movements may irrevocably become threatened by the very instability that the foundationalism movement creates.

6. I use the term *heterosexual matrix* throughout this text to designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized. I am drawing from Monique Wittig’s notion of the “heterosexual contract” and, to a lesser extent, on Adrienne Rich’s notion of “compulsory heterosexuality” to characterize a hegemonic discourse/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (massively expressing male, femininity expresses female) that is oppositional and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality.

7. For a discussion of the sex/gender distinction in structuralist anthropological and feminist appropriations and critiques of that formulation, see chapter 2, section i., “Structuralism’s Critical Exchange.”


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21. The radical ontological disjunction in Sartre between consciousness and the body is part of the Cartesian inheritance of his philosophy. Significantly, it is Descartes's distinction that Hegel implicitly interrogates at the outset of the "Master-Slave" section of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Beauvoir's analysis of the masculine subject and the feminine Other is clearly situated in Hegel's dialectic and in the Lacanian reformulation of that dialectic in the sections on sadism and masochism in *Being and Nothingness*. Critical of the very possibility of a "synthesis" of consciousness and the body, Sartre effectively returns to the Cartesian problematic that Hegel sought to overcome. Beauvoir insists that the body can be the instrument and situation of freedom and that sex can be the occasion for a gender that is not a reflection, but a modality of freedom. At first this appears to be a synthesis of body and consciousness, where consciousness is understood as the condition of freedom. The question remains, however, whether this synthesis requires and maintains the ontological distinction between body and mind of which it is composed and, by association, the hierarchy of mind over body and of masculine over feminine.


23. Gayatri Spivak most pointedly elaborates this particular kind of binary explanation as a colonizing act of marginalization. In a critique of the "self-presence of the cognizing supra-historical self," which is characteristic of the epistemic imperialism of the philosophical cogito, she locates politics in the production of knowledge that creates and circumscribes the margins that constitute, through exclusion, the contingent intelligibility of that subject's given knowledge-regime: "I call 'politics as such' the prohibition of marginality that is implicit in the production of any explanation. From that point of view, the choice of particular binary oppositions... is no mere intellectual strategy. It is, in each case, the condition of the possibility for centralization (with appropriate apologies) and, correspondingly, marginalization." (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Explanation and Culture: Marginalia,* in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1987), p. 113.)

27. The notion of the "Symbolic" is discussed at some length in Section Two of this text. It is to be understood as an ideal and universal set of cultural laws that govern kinship and signification and, within the terms of psychoanalytic structuralism, govern the production of sexual difference. Based on the notion of an idealized "paternal law," the Symbolic is reconstituted by Irigaray as a dominant and hegemonic discourse of phallocentrism. Some French feminists propose an alternative language to one governed by the Phallus or the paternal law, and so wage a critique against the Symbolic. Kristeva proposes the "semiotic" as a specifically maternal dimension of language, and both Irigaray and Hélène Cixous have been associated with écriture feminine. Wittig, however, has always resisted that movement, claiming that language in its structure is neither misogynist nor feminist, but an instrument to be deployed for developed political purposes. Clearly her belief in a "subjective subject" that exists prior to language facilitates her understanding of language as an instrument, rather than as a field of significations that preexist and structure subject-formation itself.


29. "One must assume both a particular and a universal point of view, at least to be part of literature," Monique Wittig, "The Trojan Horse," Feminist Issues, Vol. 4, No. 2, Fall 1984, p. 68.

30. The journal, Questions Feministes, available in English translation as Feminist Issues, generally defended a "maximalist" point of view which took practices, institution, and the constructed status of language to be the "material grounds" of the oppression of women. Wittig was part of the original editorial staff. Along with Monique Plaza, Wittig argued that sexual difference was essentialist in that it derived the meaning of women's social function from their biological facticity, but also because it subscribed to the primary signification of women's bodies as maternal and, hence, gave ideological strength to the hegemony of reproductive sexuality.


33. Ibid., p. 2.

34. Aretha's song, originally written by Carole King, also contests the naturalization of gender. "Like a natural woman" is a phrase that suggests that "naturalness" is only accomplished through analogy or metaphor. In other words, "You make me feel like a metaphor of the natural," and without "you," some denaturalized ground would be revealed. For a further discussion of Aretha's claim in light of Simone de Beauvoir's contention that "one not, but rather becomes a woman," see my "Beauvoir's Philosophical Contribution," in edns. Ann Gayt and Marjorie Pearsall, Women, Knowledge, and Reality (Rowman and Allenheld, forthcoming).


36. See chapter 3, section ii.

37. Foucault, ed., Herculine Barbin, p. x.


40. Wittig, "One is Not Born a Woman," p. 48. Wittig credits both the notion of the "mark" of gender and the "imaginary formation" of natural groups to Colette Guillain, whose work on the mark of race provides an analogy for Wittig's analysis of gender in "Race et nature: Système des marques, idée de group naturel et rapport sociaux," Phroiel, Vol. 11, 1977. The "Myth of Woman" is a chapter of Beauvoir's The Second Sex.


42. Clearly, Wittig does not understand syntax to be the linguistic elaboration or reproduction of a kinship system paternally organized. Her refusal of structuralism at this level allows her to understand language as gender-neutral. Irigaray's Parler n'est jamais neutre (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1983) criticizes precisely the kind of humanist position, here characteristic of Wittig, that claims the political and gender neutrality of language.

43. Monique Wittig, "The Point of View: Universal or Particular?" p. 63.


46. I am grateful to Wendy Owen for this phrase.

48. A more comprehensive analysis of the Lacanian position is provided in various parts of chapter 2 of this text.


51. "What distinguishes psychoanalysis from sociological accounts of gender (hence for me the fundamental impasse of Nancy Chodorow's work) is that whereas for the latter, the internalization of norms is assumed so lightly to work, the basic premise and indeed starting point of psychoanalysis is that it does not. The unconscious constantly resists the 'failure' of identity" (Jacqueline Rose, Sexuality in the Field of Vision, p. 90).

52. It is, perhaps, no wonder that the singular structuralist notion of "the Law" clearly resonates with the prohibitive law of the Old Testament. The "paternal law" thus comes under a post-structuralist critique through the understandable route of a French reappropriation of Nietzsche. Nietzsche faults the Judeo-Christian "slave-morality" for conceiving the law in both singular and prohibitive terms - the will-to-power, on the other hand, designates both the productive and multiple possibilities of the law, effectively exposing the notion of "the Law" in its singularity as a active and repressive notion.


54. Irigaray's perhaps most controversial claim has been that the structure of the vulva as "two lips touching" constitutes the nonbinary and autonomus pleasure of women prior to the "separation" of this doubleness through the pleasure-depriving act of penetration by the penis. See Irigaray, C'est sexe qui n'est pas sex. Along with Monique Plaza and Christine Delphy, Wittig has argued that Irigaray's valorization of this anatomical specificity is itself an uncritical replication of a reproductive discourse that marks and carves up the female body into artificial "parts" like "vagina," "dilitoris," and "vulva." At a lecture at Vassar College, Wittig was asked whether she had a vagina, and she replied that she did not.

55. See a compelling argument for precisely this interpretation by Diana J. Fuss, Essentially Speaking (New York: Routledge, 1989).

56. If we were to apply Fredric Jameson's distinction between parody and pastiche, gay identities would be better understood as pastiche. Whereas parody, Jameson argues, sustains some sympathy with the original of which it is a copy, pastiche disputes the possibility of an "original" or, in the case of gender, reveals the "original" in a failed effort to "copy" a phantasmatic ideal that cannot be copied without failure. See Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983).

2. Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix

1. During the seminars in which I write this chapter, I am teaching Kafka's "In the Penal Colony," which describes an instrument of torture that provides an interesting analogy for the contemporary field of power and masculinity in particular. The narrative repeatedly insists in its attempt to recount the history which would erase that instrument as a vital part of a tradition. The origins cannot be recovered, and the map that might lead to the origin has become unreadable through time. Those to whom it might be explained do not speak the same language and have no recourse to translation. Indeed, the machine itself cannot be fully imagined; its parts don't fit together in a conceivable whole, so the reader is forced to imagine its state of fragmentation without recourse to an ideal notion of its integrity. This appears to be a literal enactment of Foucault's notion that "power" has become so diffuse that it no longer exists as a systematic totality. Derrida interrogates the problematic authority of such a law in the context of Kafka's "Before the Law" (in Derrida's "Before the Law," in Kafka and the Contemporary Critical Performance: Centenary Readings, ed.
Alan Udoe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). He underscores the radical unfruitfulness of this repression through a narrative recapitulation of a time before the law. Significantly, it also remains impossible to articulate a critique of that law through recourse to a time before the law.


7. See Lévi-Strauss, The Elementary Structures of Kinship, p. 480; "Exchange—and consequently the rule of exogamy which expresses it—has in itself a social value. It provides the means of binding men together.


9. One might consider the literary analysis of Eve Sedgwick's Between Men: English Literature and Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) in light of Lévi-Strauss's description of the structures of reciprocity within kinship. Sedgwick effectively argues that the fluctuating assertions paid to women in romantic poetry are both a deflection and an elaboration of male homosocial desire. Women are poetic "objects of exchange" in the sense that they mediate the relationship of unequal desire between men as the explicit and ostensible object of discourse.


11. Clearly, Lévi-Strauss misses an opportunity to analyze incest as both fantasy and social practice, the two being in no way mutually exclusive.


13. To be the Phallus is to "embody" the Phallus as the place to which it penetrates, but also to signify the promise of a return to the primordial jouissance that characterizes the undifferentiated relation to the mother.

In the following section of this chapter, "Freud and the Melancholia of Gender," I attempt to lay out the central meaning of melancholia as the consequence of a disavowed grief as it applies to the incest taboo which founds sexual positions and genders through instituting certain forms of disavowed losses.

Significantly, Lacan’s discussion of the lesbian is contingent within the text to his discussion of frigidity, as if to suggest metonymically that lesbianism constitutes the denial of sexuality. A further reading of the operations of “desire” in this analysis is clearly in order.


For a contemporary refutation of such plain inferences, see Esther Newton and Shirley Walton, “The Misunderstanding: Toward a More Precise Sexual Vocabulary,” in Pleasure and Danger, ed. Carol Lan (Boston: Routledge, 1984), pp. 242–250. Newton and Walton distinguish among erotic identities, erotic acts, and erotic acts and show how radical discontinuities can exist between styles of desire and styles of gender such that erotic preferences cannot be directly inferred from the presentation of an erotic identity in social context. Although I find their analysis useful (and brave), I wonder whether such categories are themselves specific to discursive contexts and whether that kind of fragmentation of sexuality into component “parts” makes sense only as a counterstrategy to refute the seductive unification of these terms.

The notion of a sexual “orientation” has been debly called into question by Bell Hooks in Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (Boston: South End Press, 1984). She claims that it is a reification that falsely signals openness to all members of the sex that is designated as the object of desire. Although she disputes the term because it puts into question the autonomy of the person described, I would emphasize that “orientations” themselves are rarely, if ever, fixed. Obviously, they can shift through time and are open to cultural reformulations that are in no sense universal.


Stephen Heath points out that Rivière faced as an intellectual woman in competition for recognition by the psychoanalytic establishment suggests strong parallels, if not an ultimate identification, with the analysis that she depicts in the article.


Jacqueline Rose, "Introduction II" in Feminine Sexuality, eds. Mitchell and Rose, p. 44.

Ibid., p. 55.

Rose criticizes the work of Mountapha Safoyan in particular for failing to understand the incomparability of the semantic and the real. See his La sexualité féminine dans la doctrine freudienne (Paris: Jean-Paul de Scull, 1976). I am indebted to Elizabeth Weed for discussing the anti-developmental impetus in Lacan with me.

See Friedrich Nietzsche, “First Essay,” in The Genealogy of Morals, Walter Kaufmann, trans. (New York: Vintage, 1969), for this analysis of slave-morality. Here as elsewhere in his writing, Nietzsche argues that God is created by the will-to-power as a self-debasng act and that the recovery of the will-to-power from the construct of self-subjection is possible through a reclaiming of the very creative powers that produced the thought of God and, paradoxically, of human powerlessness. Foucault’s Discipline and Punish is clearly based on Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals, most clearly the “Second Essay” as well as Nietzsche’s Daybreak. His distinction between productive and juridical power is also clearly rooted in Nietzsche’s analysis of the self-subjection of the will. In Foucault’s terms, the construction of the juridical law is the effect of productive power, but only in productive power does it institute its own concealment and subordination. Foucault’s critique of Lacan (see History of Sexuality, Volume I, An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Vintage, 1980), p. 81) and the repressive hypothesis generally centers on the overdetermined status of the juridical law.

Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman, pp. 66–73.

See Julia Kristeva Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art, ed. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Soleil noir: Dérision et melancholie (Paris: Gallimard, 1987). Kristeva’s reading of melancholy in this latter text is based in part on the writings of Melanie Klein. Melancholy is the matrical impulsion turned against the female subject and hence is linked both with the process of masochism. Kristeva appears to accept the notion of primary aggression in this text and to differentiate the »sexes according to the primary object of aggression and the manner in which they refrain to commit the murders they most profusely want to commit. The masculine position is thus understood as an externally directed sadness, whereas the feminine is an internally directed masochism. For Kristeva, melancholy is a “vulgarizing sadness” that seems tied to the sublimated production of art. The higher cinema points out that the situation of that sublimation seem to center on the suffering on the basis of its own. As a result, Kristeva ends the book, abruptly and a bit polemically, extolling the great works of modernism that anti-slate the tragic structure of human action and condemning the postmodern effort to affirm, rather than to suffer, contemporary fragmentations of the psyche. For a discussion of the role of melancholy in ‘Motherhood According to Bellini,” see chapter 3, section 1, of this text, “The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva.”


35. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok take exception to this conflating of mourning and melancholia. See note 39 below.

36. For a psychoanalytic theory that argues in favor of a distinction between the super-ego as a punishing mechanism and the ego-ideal (as an idealization) that serves a narcissistic wish, a distinction that Freud clearly does not make in The Ego and the Id, one might want to consult Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, The Ego-Ideal, A Psychological Essay on the Malady of the Id, trans. Paul Barrows, introduction by Christopher Lasch (New York: Norton, 1983), originally published as L'ideal du moi. His text engages a naive developmental model of sexuality that degrades homosexuality and regularly engages a polemic against feminism and Lacan.


40. Irigaray, Speculum of Other Woman, p. 68.

41. See Schafer, A New Language for Psychoanalysis, p. 177. In this and in his earlier work, Aspects of Internalisation, Schafer makes clear that the tropes of internalization spaces are phantasmatic constructions, but not processes. This clearly coincides in an interesting way with the terms put forward by Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok that "Incorporation is merely a fantasy that reassures the ego" ("Introjection-Incorporation, p. 5.

42. Clearly, this is the theoretical foundation of Monique Wittig's The Lesbian Body, trans. Peter Owen (New York: Avon, 1976), which suggests that the heterosexualized female body is compartmentalized and rendered sexually unresponsive. The dismembering and reconstituting process of that body through lesbian love-making performs the "inversion" that reveals the socio-called integrated body as fully disinvested and deterritorialized and the "literally" disintegrated body as capable of sexual pleasure throughout the surfaces of the body. Significantly, there are no stable surfaces on these bodies; the political principle of compulsory heterosexuality is understood to determine what counts as a whole, completed, and anatomically discrete body. Wittig's narrative (which is at once an autogressive) brings those culturally constructed notions of bodily integrity into question.

43. This notion of the surface of the body as protected is partially addressed by Freud's own concept of "the bodily ego." Freud's claim that "the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego" (The Ego and the Id, p. 16) suggests that there is a conce of the body that determines ego-development. Freud continues the above sentence: "[the body] is not merely a surface expression, but a projection of a surface." For an interesting discussion of Freud's view, see Richard Wollheim, "The bodily ego," in Philosophical Essays on Freud ed. Richard Wollheim and Jacques Derrida (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). For a provocative interpretation of the "skin ego," which, unfortunately, does not consider the implications of its account for the sexed body, see Didier Amieu, Le Mosaique (Paris: Bordas, 1985), published in English as The Skin Ego: A Psychoanalytic Theory of the Self, trans. Chris Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

44. See chapter 2, n. 4. Hereafter page references to this essay will appear in the text.

45. See Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in Pleasure and Danger, pp. 267–318. Rubin's presentation on power and sexuality at the 1979 conference on
Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* occasioned an important shift in my own thinking about the constructed status of lesbian sexuality.


3. Subversive Bodily Acts


3. Ibid., p. 25.


5. Ibid., p. 135.

6. Ibid., p. 134.

7. Ibid., p. 136.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., p. 239.

10. Ibid., pp. 239–240.


13. Ibid., p. 149.


15. See Plato’s *Symposium*, 208a: Of the procréance... of the spirits... he writes that it is the specific capacity of the poet. Hence, poetic creations are understood as sublimated reproductive desire.


18. “The notion of ‘sex’ made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conduct, sensations, pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a ‘sexual principle’” Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, p. 154. See chapter 7, section i, where the passage is quoted.


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