

Thinking Gender

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G*ENDER* **T***ROUBLE*

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**FEMINISM AND THE
SUBVERSION
OF IDENTITY**

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of juridical structures; desire is manufactured and forbidden as a ritual symbolic gesture whereby the juridical model exercises and consolidates its own power.

The incest taboo is the juridical law that is said both to prohibit incestuous desires and to construct certain gendered subjectivities through the mechanism of compulsory identification. But what is to guarantee the universality or necessity of this law? Clearly, there are anthropological debates that seek to affirm and to dispute the universality of the incest taboo,⁴⁶ and there is a second-order dispute over what, if anything, the claim to universality might imply about the meaning of social processes.⁴⁷ To claim that a law is universal is not to claim that it operates in the same way crossculturally or that it determines social life in some unilateral way. Indeed, the attribution of universality to a law may simply imply that it operates as a dominant framework within which social relations take place. Indeed, to claim the universal presence of a law in social life is in no way to claim that it exists in every aspect of the social form under consideration; minimally, it means that it exists and operates somewhere in every social form.

My task here is not to show that there are cultures in which the incest taboo as such does not operate, but rather to underscore the generativity of that taboo, where it does operate, and not merely its juridical status. In other words, not only does the taboo forbid and dictate sexuality in certain forms, but it inadvertently produces a variety of substitute desires and identities that are in no sense constrained in advance, except insofar as they are “substitutes” in some sense. If we extend the Foucaultian critique to the incest taboo, then it seems that the taboo and the original desire for mother/father can be historicized in ways that resist the formulaic universality of Lacan. The taboo might be understood to create and sustain the desire for the mother/father as well as the compulsory displacement of that desire. The notion of an “original” sexuality forever repressed and forbidden thus becomes a production of the law which subsequently functions as its prohibition. If the mother is the original desire, and that may well be true for a wide range of late-capitalist household dwellers, then that is a desire both produced and prohibited within the terms of that cultural context. In other words, the law which prohibits that union is the selfsame law that invites it, and it is no longer possible to isolate the repressive from the productive function of the juridical incest taboo.

Clearly, psychoanalytic theory has always recognized the productive function of the incest taboo; it is what creates heterosexual desire and discrete gender identity. Psychoanalysis has also been clear that

the incest taboo does not always operate to produce gender and desire in the ways intended. The example of the negative Oedipal complex is but one occasion in which the prohibition against incest is clearly stronger with respect to the opposite-sexed parent than the same-sexed parent, and the parent prohibited becomes the figure of identification. But how would this example be redescribed within the conception of the incest taboo as both juridical and generative? The desire for the parent who, tabooed, becomes the figure of identification is both produced and denied by the same mechanism of power. But for what end? If the incest taboo regulates the production of discrete gender identities, and if that production requires the prohibition and sanction of heterosexuality, then homosexuality emerges as a desire which must be produced in order to remain repressed. In other words, for heterosexuality to remain intact as a distinct social form, it *requires* an intelligible conception of homosexuality and also requires the prohibition of that conception in rendering it culturally unintelligible. Within psychoanalysis, bisexuality and homosexuality are taken to be primary libidinal dispositions, and heterosexuality is the laborious construction based upon their gradual repression. While this doctrine seems to have a subversive possibility to it, the discursive construction of both bisexuality and homosexuality within the psychoanalytic literature effectively refutes the claim to its precultural status. The discussion of the language of bisexual dispositions above is a case in point.⁴⁸

The bisexuality that is said to be “outside” the Symbolic and that serves as the locus of subversion is, in fact, a construction within the terms of that constitutive discourse, the construction of an “outside” that is nevertheless fully “inside,” not a possibility beyond culture, but a concrete cultural possibility that is refused and redescribed as impossible. What remains “unthinkable” and “unsayable” within the terms of an existing cultural form is not necessarily what is excluded from the matrix of intelligibility within that form; on the contrary, it is the marginalized, not the excluded, the cultural possibility that calls for dread or, minimally, the loss of sanctions. Not to have social recognition as an effective heterosexual is to lose one possible social identity and perhaps to gain one that is radically less sanctioned. The “unthinkable” is thus fully within culture, but fully excluded from *dominant* culture. The theory which presumes bisexuality or homosexuality as the “before” to culture and then locates that “priority” as the source of a prediscursive subversion, effectively forbids from within the terms of the culture the very subversion that it ambivalently

defends and defends against. As I will argue in the case of Kristeva, subversion thus becomes a futile gesture, entertained only in a derealized aesthetic mode which can never be translated into other cultural practices.

In the case of the incest taboo, Lacan argues that desire (as opposed to need) is instituted through that law. "Intelligible" existence within the terms of the Symbolic requires both the institutionalization of desire and its dissatisfaction, the necessary consequence of the repression of the *original* pleasure and need associated with the maternal body. This full pleasure that haunts desire as that which it can never attain is the irrecoverable memory of pleasure before the law. Lacan is clear that that pleasure before the law is only fantasized, that it recurs in the infinite phantasms of desire. But in what sense is the phantasm, itself forbidden from the literal recovery of an original pleasure, the constitution of a fantasy of "originality" that may or may not correspond to a literal libidinal state? Indeed, to what extent is such a question decidable within the terms of Lacanian theory? A displacement or substitution can only be understood as such in relation to an original, one which in this case can never be recovered or known. This speculative origin is always speculated about from a retrospective position, from which it assumes the character of an ideal. The sanctification of this pleasurable "beyond" is instituted through the invocation of a Symbolic order that is essentially unchangeable.⁴⁹ Indeed, one needs to read the drama of the Symbolic, of desire, of the institution of sexual difference as a self-supporting signifying economy that wields power in the marking off of what can and cannot be thought within the terms of cultural intelligibility. Mobilizing the distinction between what is "before" and what is "during" culture is one way to foreclose cultural possibilities from the start. The "order of appearances," the founding temporality of the account, as much as it contests narrative coherence by introducing the split into the subject and the *fêlure* into desire, reinstates a coherence at the level of temporal exposition. As a result, this narrative strategy, revolving upon the distinction between an irrecoverable origin and a perpetually displaced present, makes all effort at recovering that origin in the name of subversion inevitably belated.

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Subversive Bodily Acts

i. The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva

Kristeva's theory of the semiotic dimension of language at first appears to engage Lacanian premises only to expose their limits and to offer a specifically feminine locus of subversion of the paternal law within language.¹ According to Lacan, the paternal law structures all linguistic signification, termed "the Symbolic," and so becomes a universal organizing principle of culture itself. This law creates the possibility of meaningful language and, hence, meaningful experience, through the repression of primary libidinal drives, including the radical dependency of the child on the maternal body. Hence, the Symbolic becomes possible by repudiating the primary relationship to the maternal body. The "subject" who emerges as a consequence of this repression becomes a bearer or proponent of this repressive law. The libidinal chaos characteristic of that early dependency is now fully constrained by a unitary agent whose language is structured by that law. This language, in turn, structures the world by suppressing multiple meanings (which always recall the libidinal multiplicity which characterized the primary relation to the maternal body) and instating univocal and discrete meanings in their place.

Kristeva challenges the Lacanian narrative which assumes cultural meaning requires the repression of that primary relationship to the maternal body. She argues that the "semiotic" is a dimension of language occasioned by that primary maternal body, which not only refutes Lacan's primary premise, but serves as a perpetual source of subversion within the Symbolic. For Kristeva, the semiotic expresses that original libidinal multiplicity within the very terms of culture, more precisely, within poetic language in which multiple meanings

and semantic nonclosure prevail. In effect, poetic language is the recovery of the maternal body within the terms of language, one that has the potential to disrupt, subvert, and displace the paternal law.

Despite her critique of Lacan, however, Kristeva's strategy of subversion proves doubtful. Her theory appears to depend upon the stability and reproduction of precisely the paternal law that she seeks to displace. Although she effectively exposes the limits of Lacan's efforts to universalize the paternal law in language, she nevertheless concedes that the semiotic is invariably subordinate to the Symbolic, that it assumes its specificity within the terms of a hierarchy immune to challenge. If the semiotic promotes the possibility of the subversion, displacement, or disruption of the paternal law, what meanings can those terms have if the Symbolic always reasserts its hegemony?

The criticism of Kristeva which follows takes issue with several steps in Kristeva's argument in favor of the semiotic as a source of effective subversion. First, it is unclear whether the primary relationship to the maternal body which both Kristeva and Lacan appear to accept is a viable construct and whether it is even a knowable experience according to either of their linguistic theories. The multiple drives that characterize the semiotic constitute a prediscursive libidinal economy which occasionally makes itself known in language, but which maintains an ontological status prior to language itself. Manifest in language, in poetic language in particular, this prediscursive libidinal economy becomes a locus of cultural subversion. A second problem emerges when Kristeva argues that this libidinal source of subversion cannot be maintained within the terms of culture, that its sustained presence within culture leads to psychosis and to the breakdown of cultural life itself. Kristeva thus alternately posits and denies the semiotic as an emancipatory ideal. Though she tells us that it is a dimension of language regularly repressed, she also concedes that it is a kind of language which never can be consistently maintained.

In order to assess her seemingly self-defeating theory, we need to ask how this libidinal multiplicity becomes manifest in language, and what conditions its temporary lifespan there? Moreover, Kristeva describes the maternal body as bearing a set of meanings that are prior to culture itself. She thereby safeguards the notion of culture as a paternal structure and delimits maternity as an essentially precultural reality. Her naturalistic descriptions of the maternal body effectively reify motherhood and preclude an analysis of its cultural construction and variability. In asking whether a prediscursive libidinal multiplicity is possible, we will also consider whether what Kristeva claims to discover in the prediscursive maternal body is itself a production of

a given historical discourse, an *effect* of culture rather than its secret and primary cause.

Even if we accept Kristeva's theory of primary drives, it is unclear that the subversive effects of such drives can serve, via the semiotic, as anything more than a temporary and futile disruption of the hegemony of the paternal law. I will try to show how the failure of her political strategy follows in part from her largely uncritical appropriation of drive theory. Moreover, upon careful scrutiny of her descriptions of the semiotic function within language, it appears that Kristeva reinstates the paternal law at the level of the semiotic itself. In the end, it seems that Kristeva offers us a strategy of subversion that can never become a sustained political practice. In the final part of this section, I will suggest a way to reconceptualize the relation between drives, language, and patriarchal prerogative which might serve a more effective strategy of subversion.

Kristeva's description of the semiotic proceeds through a number of problematic steps. She assumes that drives have aims prior to their emergence into language, that language invariably represses or sublimates these drives, and that such drives are manifest only in those linguistic expressions which disobey, as it were, the univocal requirements of signification within the Symbolic domain. She claims further that the emergence of multiplicitous drives into language is evident in the semiotic, that domain of linguistic meaning distinct from the Symbolic, which is the maternal body manifest in poetic speech.

As early as *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), Kristeva argues for a necessary causal relation between the heterogeneity of drives and the plurivocal possibilities of poetic language. Differing from Lacan, she maintains that poetic language is not predicated upon a repression of primary drives. On the contrary, poetic language, she claims, is the linguistic occasion on which drives break apart the usual, univocal terms of language and reveal an irrepressible heterogeneity of multiple sounds and meanings. Kristeva thereby contests Lacan's equation of the Symbolic with all linguistic meaning by asserting that poetic language has its own modality of meaning which does not conform to the requirements of univocal designation.

In this same work, she subscribes to a notion of free or uncathected energy which makes itself known in language through the poetic function. She claims, for instance, that "in the intermingling of drives in language . . . we shall see the economy of poetic language" and that in this economy, "the unitary subject can no longer find his [sic] place."² This poetic function is a rejective or divisive linguistic function which tends to fracture and multiply meanings; it enacts the heterogeneity of drives through the proliferation and destruction of

univocal signification. Hence, the urge toward a highly differentiated or plurivocal set of meanings appears as the revenge of drives against the rule of the Symbolic, which, in turn, is predicated upon their repression. Kristeva defines the semiotic as the multiplicity of drives manifest in language. With their insistent energy and heterogeneity, these drives disrupt the signifying function. Thus, in this early work, she defines the semiotic as “the signifying function . . . connected to the modality [of] primary process.”³

In the essays that comprise *Desire in Language* (1977), Kristeva ground her definition of the semiotic more fully in psychoanalytic terms. The primary drives that the Symbolic represses and the semiotic obliquely indicates are now understood as *maternal drives*, not only those drives belonging to the mother, but those which characterize the dependency of the infant’s body (of either sex) on the mother. In other words, “the maternal body” designates a relation of continuity rather than a discrete subject or object of desire; indeed, it designates that *jouissance* which precedes desire and the subject/object dichotomy that desire presupposes. While the Symbolic is predicated upon the rejection of the mother, the semiotic, through rhythm, assonance, intonations, sound play, and repetition, re-presents or recovers the maternal body in poetic speech. Even the “first echolalias of infants” and the “glossalalias in psychotic discourse” are manifestations of the continuity of the mother-infant relation, a heterogeneous field of impulse prior to the separation/individuation of infant and mother, alike effected by the imposition of the incest taboo.⁴ The separation of the mother and infant effected by the taboo is expressed linguistically as the severing of sound from sense. In Kristeva’s words, “a phoneme, as distinctive element of meaning, belongs to language as Symbolic. But this same phoneme is involved in rhythmic, intonational repetitions; it thereby tends toward autonomy from meaning so as to maintain itself in a semiotic disposition near the instinctual drive’s body.”⁵

The semiotic is described by Kristeva as destroying or eroding the Symbolic; it is said to be “before” meaning, as when a child begins to vocalize, or “after” meaning, as when a psychotic no longer uses words to signify. If the Symbolic and the semiotic are understood as two modalities of language, and if the semiotic is understood to be generally repressed by the Symbolic, then language for Kristeva is understood as a system in which the Symbolic remains hegemonic except when the semiotic disrupts its signifying process through elision, repetition, mere sound, and the multiplication of meaning through indefinitely signifying images and metaphors. In its Symbolic mode, language rests upon a severance of the relation of maternal

dependency, whereby it becomes abstract (abstracted from the materiality of language) and univocal; this is most apparent in quantitative or purely formal reasoning. In its semiotic mode, language is engaged in a poetic recovery of the maternal body, that diffuse materiality that resists all discrete and univocal signification. Kristeva writes:

In any poetic language, not only do the rhythmic constraints, for example, go so far as to violate certain grammatical rules of a national language . . . but in recent texts, these semiotic constraints (rhythm, vocalic timbres in Symbolist work, but also graphic disposition on the page) are accompanied by nonrecoverable syntactic elisions; it is impossible to reconstitute the particular elided syntactic category (object or verb), which makes the meaning of the utterance decidable.⁶

For Kristeva, this undecidability is precisely the instinctual moment in language, its disruptive function. Poetic language thus suggests a dissolution of the coherent, signifying subject into the primary continuity which is the maternal body:

Language as Symbolic function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother. On the contrary, the unsettled and questionable subject of poetic language (from whom the word is never uniquely sign) maintains itself at the cost of reactivating this repressed, instinctual, maternal element.⁷

Kristeva’s references to the “subject” of poetic language are not wholly appropriate, for poetic language erodes and destroys the subject, where the subject is understood as a speaking being participating in the Symbolic. Following Lacan, she maintains that the prohibition against the incestuous union with the mother is the founding law of the subject, a foundation which severs or breaks the continuous relation of maternal dependency. In creating the subject, the prohibitive law creates the domain of the Symbolic or language as a system of univocally signifying signs. Hence, Kristeva concludes that “poetic language would be for its questionable subject-in-process the equivalent of incest.”⁸ The breaking of Symbolic language against its own founding law or, equivalently, the emergence of rupture into language from within its own interior instinctuality, is not merely the outburst of libidinal heterogeneity into language; it also signifies the somatic state of dependency on the maternal body prior to the individuation of the ego. Poetic language thus always indicates a return to the

maternal terrain, where the maternal signifies both libidinal dependency and the heterogeneity of drives.

In "Motherhood According to Bellini," Kristeva suggests that, because the maternal body signifies the loss of coherent and discrete identity, poetic language verges on psychosis. And in the case of a woman's semiotic expressions in language, the return to the maternal signifies a prediscursive homosexuality that Kristeva also clearly associates with psychosis. Although Kristeva concedes that poetic language is sustained culturally through its participation in the Symbolic and, hence, in the norms of linguistic communicability, she fails to allow that homosexuality is capable of the same nonpsychotic social expression. The key to Kristeva's view of the psychotic nature of homosexuality is to be understood, I would suggest, in her acceptance of the structuralist assumption that heterosexuality is coextensive with the founding of the Symbolic. Hence, the cathexis of homosexual desire can be achieved, according to Kristeva, only through displacements that are sanctioned within the Symbolic, such as poetic language or the act of giving birth:

By giving birth, the woman enters into contact with her mother; she becomes, she is her own mother; they are the same continuity differentiating itself. She thus actualizes the homosexual facet of motherhood, through which a woman is simultaneously closer to her instinctual memory, more open to her psychosis, and consequently, more negatory of the social, symbolic bond.⁹

According to Kristeva, the act of giving birth does not successfully reestablish that continuous relation prior to individuation because the infant invariably suffers the prohibition on incest and is separated off as a discrete identity. In the case of the mother's separation from the girl-child, the result is melancholy for both, for the separation is never fully completed.

As opposed to grief or mourning, in which separation is recognized and the libido attached to the original object is successfully displaced onto a new substitute object, melancholy designates a failure to grieve in which the loss is simply internalized and, in that sense, *refused*. Instead of a negative attachment to the body, the maternal body is internalized as a negation, so that the girl's identity becomes itself a kind of loss, a characteristic privation or lack.

The alleged psychosis of homosexuality, then, consists in its thorough break with the paternal law and with the grounding of the female "ego," tenuous though it may be, in the melancholic response

to separation from the maternal body. Hence, according to Kristeva, female homosexuality is the emergence of psychosis into culture:

The homosexual-maternal facet is a whirl of words, a complete absence of meaning and seeing; it is feeling, displacement, rhythm, sound, flashes, and fantasied clinging to the maternal body as a screen against the plunge . . . for woman, a paradise lost but seemingly close at hand.¹⁰

For women, however, this homosexuality is manifest in poetic language which becomes, in fact, the only form of the semiotic, besides childbirth, which can be sustained within the terms of the Symbolic. For Kristeva, then, overt homosexuality cannot be a culturally sustainable activity, for it would constitute a breaking of the incest taboo in an unmediated way. And yet why is this the case?

Kristeva accepts the assumption that culture is equivalent to the Symbolic, that the Symbolic is fully subsumed under the "Law of the Father," and that the only modes of nonpsychotic activity are those which participate in the Symbolic to some extent. Her strategic task, then, is neither to replace the Symbolic with the semiotic nor to establish the semiotic as a rival cultural possibility, but rather to validate those experiences within the Symbolic that permit a manifestation of the borders which divide the Symbolic from the semiotic. Just as birth is understood to be a cathexis of instinctual drives for the purposes of a social teleology, so poetic production is conceived as the site in which the split between instinct and representation exists in culturally communicable form:

The speaker reaches this limit, this requisite of sociality, only by virtue of a particular, discursive practice called "art." A woman also attains it (and in our society, *especially*) through the strange form of split symbolization (threshold of language and instinctual drive, of the "symbolic" and the "semiotic") of which the act of giving birth consists.¹¹

Hence, for Kristeva, poetry and maternity represent privileged practices within paternally sanctioned culture which permit a nonpsychotic experience of that heterogeneity and dependency characteristic of the maternal terrain. These acts of *poesis* reveal an instinctual heterogeneity that subsequently exposes the repressed ground of the Symbolic, challenges the mastery of the univocal signifier, and diffuses the autonomy of the subject who postures as their necessary ground. The heterogeneity of drives operates culturally as a subversive strategy

of displacement, one which dislodges the hegemony of the paternal law by releasing the repressed multiplicity interior to language itself. Precisely because that instinctual heterogeneity must be re-presented in and through the paternal law, it cannot defy the incest taboo altogether, but must remain within the most fragile regions of the Symbolic. Obedient, then, to syntactical requirements, the poetic-maternal practices of displacing the paternal law always remain tenuously tethered to that law. Hence, a full-scale refusal of the Symbolic is impossible, and a discourse of “emancipation,” for Kristeva, is out of the question. At best, tactical subversions and displacements of the law challenge its self-grounding presumption. But, once again, Kristeva does not seriously challenge the structuralist assumption that the prohibitive paternal law is foundational to culture itself. Hence, the subversion of paternally sanctioned culture can not come from another version of culture, but only from within the repressed interior of culture itself, from the heterogeneity of drives that constitutes culture’s concealed foundation.

This relation between heterogeneous drives and the paternal law produces an exceedingly problematic view of psychosis. On the one hand, it designates female homosexuality as a culturally unintelligible practice, inherently psychotic: on the other hand, it mandates maternity as a compulsory defense against libidinal chaos. Although Kristeva does not make either claim explicitly, both implications follow from her views on the law, language, and drives. Consider that for Kristeva poetic language breaks the incest taboo and, as such, verges always on psychosis. As a return to the maternal body and a concomitant de-individuation of the ego, poetic language becomes especially threatening when uttered by women. The poetic then contests not only the incest taboo, but the taboo against homosexuality as well. Poetic language is thus, for women, both displaced maternal dependency and, because that dependency is libidinal, displaced homosexuality.

For Kristeva, the unmediated cathexis of female homosexual desire leads unequivocally to psychosis. Hence, one can satisfy this drive only through a series of displacements: the incorporation of maternal identity—that is, by becoming a mother oneself—or through poetic language which manifests obliquely the heterogeneity of drives characteristic of maternal dependency. As the only socially sanctioned and, hence, nonpsychotic displacements for homosexual desire, both maternity and poetry constitute melancholic experiences for women appropriately acculturated into heterosexuality. The heterosexual poet-mother suffers interminably from the displacement of the homosexual cathexis. And yet, the consummation of this desire would lead

to the psychotic unraveling of identity, according to Kristeva—the presumption being that, for women, heterosexuality and coherent selfhood are indissolubly linked.

How are we to understand this constitution of lesbian experience as the site of an irretrievable self-loss? Kristeva clearly takes heterosexuality to be prerequisite to kinship and to culture. Consequently, she identifies lesbian experience as the psychotic alternative to the acceptance of paternally sanctioned laws. And yet why is lesbianism constituted as psychosis? From what cultural perspective is lesbianism constructed as a site of fusion, self-loss, and psychosis?

By projecting the lesbian as “Other” to culture, and characterizing lesbian speech as the psychotic “whirl-of-words,” Kristeva constructs lesbian sexuality as intrinsically unintelligible. This tactical dismissal and reduction of lesbian experience performed in the name of the law positions Kristeva within the orbit of paternal-heterosexual privilege. The paternal law which protects her from this radical incoherence is precisely the mechanism that produces the construct of lesbianism as a site of irrationality. Significantly, this description of lesbian experience is effected from the outside and tells us more about the fantasies that a fearful heterosexual culture produces to defend against its own homosexual possibilities than about lesbian experience itself.

In claiming that lesbianism designates a loss of self, Kristeva appears to be delivering a psychoanalytic truth about the repression necessary for individuation. The fear of such a “regression” to homosexuality is, then, a fear of losing cultural sanction and privilege altogether. Although Kristeva claims that this loss designates a place *prior* to culture, there is no reason not to understand it as a new or unacknowledged cultural form. In other words, Kristeva prefers to explain lesbian experience as a regressive libidinal state prior to acculturation itself, rather than to take up the challenge that lesbianism offers to her restricted view of paternally sanctioned cultural laws. Is the fear encoded in the construction of the lesbian as psychotic the result of a developmentally necessitated repression, or is it, rather, the fear of losing cultural legitimacy and, hence, being cast, not outside or prior to culture, but outside cultural *legitimacy*, still within culture, but culturally “out-lawed”?

Kristeva describes both the maternal body and lesbian experience from a position of sanctioned heterosexuality that fails to acknowledge its own fear of losing that sanction. Her reification of the paternal law not only repudiates female homosexuality, but denies the varied meanings and possibilities of motherhood as a cultural practice. But *cultural* subversion is not really Kristeva’s concern, for subversion, when it appears, emerges from beneath the surface of culture only

inevitably to return there. Although the semiotic is a possibility of language that escapes the paternal law, it remains inevitably within or, indeed, beneath the territory of that law. Hence, poetic language and the pleasures of maternity constitute local displacements of the paternal law, temporary subversions which finally submit to that against which they initially rebel. By relegating the source of subversion to a site outside of culture itself, Kristeva appears to foreclose the possibility of subversion as an effective or realizable cultural practice. Pleasure beyond the paternal law can be imagined only together with its inevitable impossibility.

Kristeva's theory of thwarted subversion is premised on her problematic view of the relation among drives, language, and the law. Her postulation of a subversive multiplicity of drives raises a number of epistemological and political questions. In the first place, if these drives are manifest only in language or cultural forms already determined as Symbolic, then how is it that we can verify their pre-Symbolic ontological status? Kristeva argues that poetic language gives us access to these drives in their fundamental multiplicity, but this answer is not fully satisfactory. Since poetic language is said to depend upon the prior existence of these multiplicitous drives, we cannot, then, in circular fashion, justify the postulated existence of these drives through recourse to poetic language. If drives must first be repressed for language to exist, and if we can attribute meaning only to that which is representable in language, then to attribute meaning to drives prior to their emergence into language is impossible. Similarly, to attribute a causality to drives which facilitates their transformation into language and by which language itself is to be explained cannot reasonably be done within the confines of language itself. In other words, we know these drives as "causes" only in and through their effects, and, as such, we have no reason for not identifying drives with their effects. It follows that either (a) drives and their representations are coextensive or (b) representations preexist the drives themselves.

This last alternative is, I would argue, an important one to consider, for how do we know that the instinctual object of Kristeva's discourse is not a construction of the discourse itself? And what grounds do we have for positing this object, this multiplicitous field, as prior to signification? If poetic language must participate in the Symbolic in order to be culturally communicable, and if Kristeva's own theoretical texts are emblematic of the Symbolic, then where are we to find a convincing "outside" to this domain? Her postulation of a prediscursive corporeal multiplicity becomes all the more problematic when we discover that maternal drives are considered part of a "biological

destiny" and are themselves manifestations of "a non-symbolic, non-paternal causality."¹² This pre-Symbolic, nonpaternal causality is, for Kristeva, a semiotic, *maternal* causality, or, more specifically, a teleological conception of maternal instincts:

Material compulsion, spasm of a memory belonging to the species that either binds together or splits apart to perpetuate itself, series of markers with no other significance than the eternal return of the life-death biological cycle. How can we verbalize this prelinguistic, unrepresentable memory? Heraclitus' flux, Epicurus' atoms, the whirling dust of cabalic, Arab and Indian mystics, and the stippled drawings of psychedelics—all seem better metaphors than the theory of Being, the logos, and its laws.¹³

Here, the repressed maternal body is not only the locus of multiple drives, but the bearer of a biological teleology as well, one which, it seems, makes itself evident in the early stages of Western philosophy, in non-Western religious beliefs and practices, in aesthetic representations produced by psychotic or near-psychotic states, and even in avant-garde artistic practices. But why are we to assume that these various cultural expressions manifest the selfsame principle of maternal heterogeneity? Kristeva simply subordinates each of these cultural moments to the same principle. Consequently, the semiotic represents any cultural effort to displace the logos (which, curiously, she *contrasts* with Heraclitus' flux), where the logos represents the univocal signifier, the law of identity. Her opposition between the semiotic and the Symbolic reduces here to a metaphysical quarrel between the principle of multiplicity that escapes the charge of non-contradiction and a principle of identity based on the suppression of that multiplicity. Oddly, that very principle of multiplicity that Kristeva everywhere defends operates in much the same manner as a principle of identity. Note the way in which all manner of things "primitive" and "Oriental" are summarily subordinated to the principle of the maternal body. Surely, her description warrants not only the charge of Orientalism, but raises the very significant question of whether, ironically, multiplicity has become a univocal signifier.

Her ascription of a teleological aim to maternal drives prior to their constitution in language or culture raises a number of questions about Kristeva's political program. Although she clearly sees subversive and disruptive potential in those semiotic expressions that challenge the hegemony of the paternal law, it is less clear in what precisely this subversion consists. If the law is understood to rest on a constructed ground, beneath which lurks the repressed maternal terrain, what

concrete cultural options emerge within the terms of culture as a consequence of this revelation? Ostensibly, the multiplicity associated with the maternal libidinal economy has the force to disperse the univocity of the paternal signifier and seemingly to create the possibility of other cultural expressions no longer tightly constrained by the law of non-contradiction. But is this disruptive activity the opening of a field of significations, or is it the manifestation of a biological archaism which operates according to a natural and “prepaternal” causality? If Kristeva believed the former were the case (and she does not), then she would be interested in a displacement of the paternal law in favor of a proliferating field of cultural possibilities. But instead, she prescribes a return to a principle of maternal heterogeneity which proves to be a closed concept, indeed, a heterogeneity confined by a teleology both unilinear and univocal.

Kristeva understands the desire to give birth as a species-desire, part of a collective and archaic female libidinal drive that constitutes an ever-recurring metaphysical reality. Here Kristeva reifies maternity and then promotes this reification as the disruptive potential of the semiotic. As a result, the paternal law, understood as the ground of univocal signification, is displaced by an equally univocal signifier, the principle of the maternal body which remains self-identical in its teleology regardless of its “multiplicitous” manifestations.

Insofar as Kristeva conceptualizes this maternal instinct as having an ontological status prior to the paternal law, she fails to consider the way in which that very law might well be the *cause* of the very desire it is said to *repress*. Rather than the manifestation of a prepaternal causality, these desires might attest to maternity as a social practice required and recapitulated by the exigencies of kinship. Kristeva accepts Lévi-Strauss’ analysis of the exchange of women as prerequisite for the consolidation of kinship bonds. She understands this exchange, however, as the cultural moment in which the maternal body is repressed, rather than as a mechanism for the compulsory cultural construction of the female body *as* a maternal body. Indeed, we might understand the exchange of women as imposing a compulsory obligation on women’s bodies to reproduce. According to Gayle Rubin’s reading of Lévi-Strauss, kinship effects a “sculpting of . . . sexuality” such that the desire to give birth is the result of social practices which require and produce such desires in order to effect their reproductive ends.¹⁴

What grounds, then, does Kristeva have for imputing a maternal teleology to the female body prior to its emergence into culture? To pose the question in this way is already to question the distinction between the Symbolic and the semiotic on which her conception of

the maternal body is premised. The maternal body in its originary signification is considered by Kristeva to be prior to signification itself; hence, it becomes impossible within her framework to consider the maternal itself as a signification, open to cultural variability. Her argument makes clear that maternal drives constitute those primary processes that language invariably represses or sublimates. But perhaps her argument could be recast within an even more encompassing framework: What cultural configuration of language, indeed, of *discourse*, generates the trope of a pre-discursive libidinal multiplicity, and for what purposes?

By restricting the paternal law to a prohibitive or repressive function, Kristeva fails to understand the paternal mechanisms by which affectivity itself is generated. The law that is said to repress the semiotic may well be the governing principle of the semiotic itself, with the result that what passes as “maternal instinct” may well be a culturally constructed desire which is interpreted through a naturalistic vocabulary. And if that desire is constructed according to a law of kinship which requires the heterosexual production and reproduction of desire, then the vocabulary of naturalistic affect effectively renders that “paternal law” invisible. What for Kristeva is a pre-paternal causality would then appear as a *paternal* causality under the guise of a natural or distinctively maternal causality.

Significantly, the figuration of the maternal body and the teleology of its instincts as a self-identical and insistent metaphysical principle—an archaism of a collective, sex-specific biological constitution—bases itself on a univocal conception of the female sex. And this sex, conceived as both origin and causality, poses as a principle of pure generativity. Indeed, for Kristeva, it is equated with *poesis* itself, that activity of making upheld in Plato’s *Symposium* as an act of birth and poetic conception at once.¹⁵ But is female generativity truly an uncaused cause, and does it begin the narrative that takes all of humanity under the force of the incest taboo and into language? Does the pre-paternal causality whereof Kristeva speaks signify a primary female economy of pleasure and meaning? Can we reverse the very order of this causality and understand this semiotic economy as a production of a prior discourse?

In the final chapter of Foucault’s first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, he cautions against using the category of sex as a “fictitious unity . . . [and] causal principle” and argues that the fictitious category of sex facilitates a reversal of causal relations such that “sex” is understood to cause the structure and meaning of desire:

the notion of 'sex' made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning: sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as a universal signified.¹⁶

For Foucault, the body is not "sexed" in any significant sense prior to its determination within a discourse through which it becomes invested with an "idea" of natural or essential sex. The body gains meaning within discourse only in the context of power relations. Sexuality is an historically specific organization of power, discourse, bodies, and affectivity. As such, sexuality is understood by Foucault to produce "sex" as an artificial concept which effectively extends and disguises the power relations responsible for its genesis.

Foucault's framework suggests a way to solve some of the epistemological and political difficulties that follow from Kristeva's view of the female body. We can understand Kristeva's assertion of a "pre-paternal causality" as fundamentally inverted. Whereas Kristeva posits a maternal body prior to discourse that exerts its own causal force in the structure of drives, Foucault would doubtless argue that the discursive production of the maternal body as prediscursive is a tactic in the self-amplification and concealment of those specific power relations by which the trope of the maternal body is produced. In these terms, the maternal body would no longer be understood as the hidden ground of all signification, the tacit cause of all culture. It would be understood, rather, as an effect or consequence of a system of sexuality in which the female body is required to assume maternity as the essence of its self and the law of its desire.

If we accept Foucault's framework, we are compelled to redescribe the maternal libidinal economy as a product of an historically specific organization of sexuality. Moreover, the discourse of sexuality, itself suffused by power relations, becomes the true ground of the trope of the prediscursive maternal body. Kristeva's formulation suffers a thoroughgoing reversal: The Symbolic and the semiotic are no longer interpreted as those dimensions of language which follow upon the repression or manifestation of the maternal libidinal economy. This very economy is understood instead as a reification that both extends and conceals the institution of motherhood as compulsory for women. Indeed, when the desires that maintain the institution of motherhood are transvaluated as pre-paternal and pre-cultural drives, then the institution gains a permanent legitimation in the invariant structures of the female body. Indeed, the clearly paternal law that sanctions

and requires the female body to be characterized primarily in terms of its reproductive function is inscribed on that body as the law of its natural necessity. Kristeva, safeguarding that law of a biologically necessitated maternity as a subversive operation that pre-exists the paternal law itself, aids in the systematic production of its invisibility and, consequently, the illusion of its inevitability.

Because Kristeva restricts herself to an exclusively *prohibitive* conception of the paternal law, she is unable to account for the ways in which the paternal law *generates* certain desires in the form of natural drives. The female body that she seeks to express is itself a construct produced by the very law it is supposed to undermine. In no way do these criticisms of Kristeva's conception of the paternal law necessarily invalidate her general position that culture or the Symbolic is predicated upon a repudiation of women's bodies. I want to suggest, however, that any theory that asserts that signification is predicated upon the denial or repression of a female principle ought to consider whether that femaleness is really external to the cultural norms by which it is repressed. In other words, on my reading, the repression of the feminine does not require that the agency of repression and the object of repression be ontologically distinct. Indeed, repression may be understood to produce the object that it comes to deny. That production may well be an elaboration of the agency of repression itself. As Foucault makes clear, the culturally contradictory enterprise of the mechanism of repression is prohibitive and generative at once and makes the problematic of "liberation" especially acute. The female body that is freed from the shackles of the paternal law may well prove to be yet another incarnation of that law, posing as subversive but operating in the service of that law's self-amplification and proliferation. In order to avoid the emancipation of the oppressor in the name of the oppressed, it is necessary to take into account the full complexity and subtlety of the law and to cure ourselves of the illusion of a true body beyond the law. If subversion is possible, it will be a subversion from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself. The culturally constructed body will then be liberated, neither to its "natural" past, nor to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities.

ii. Foucault, Herculine, and the Politics of Sexual Discontinuity

Foucault's genealogical critique has provided a way to criticize those Lacanian and neo-Lacanian theories that cast culturally marginal forms of sexuality as culturally unintelligible. Writing within

the terms of a disillusionment with the notion of a liberatory Eros, Foucault understands sexuality as saturated with power and offers a critical view of theories that lay claim to a sexuality before or after the law. When we consider, however, those textual occasions on which Foucault criticizes the categories of sex and the power regime of sexuality, it is clear that his own theory maintains an unacknowledged emancipatory ideal that proves increasingly difficult to maintain, even within the strictures of his own critical apparatus.

Foucault's theory of sexuality offered in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* is in some ways contradicted by his short but significant introduction to the journals he published of Herculine Barbin, a nineteenth-century French hermaphrodite. Herculine was assigned the sex of "female" at birth. In h/er early twenties, after a series of confessions to doctors and priests, s/he was legally compelled to change h/er sex to "male." The journals that Foucault claims to have found are published in this collection, along with the medical and legal documents that discuss the basis on which the designation of h/er "true" sex was decided. A satiric short story by the German writer, Oscar Panizza, is also included. Foucault supplies an introduction to the English translation of the text in which he questions whether the notion of a true sex is necessary. At first, this question appears to be continuous with the critical genealogy of the category of "sex" he offers toward the conclusion of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*.¹⁷ However, the journals and their introduction offer an occasion to consider Foucault's reading of Herculine against his theory of sexuality in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*. Although he argues in *The History of Sexuality* that sexuality is coextensive with power, he fails to recognize the concrete relations of power that both construct and condemn Herculine's sexuality. Indeed, he appears to romanticize h/er world of pleasures as the "happy limbo of a non-identity" (xiii), a world that exceeds the categories of sex and of identity. The reemergence of a discourse on sexual difference and the categories of sex within Herculine's own autobiographical writings will lead to an alternative reading of Herculine against Foucault's romanticized appropriation and refusal of her text.

In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that the univocal construct of "sex" (one is one's sex and, therefore, not the other) is (a) produced in the service of the social regulation and control of sexuality and (b) conceals and artificially unifies a variety of disparate and unrelated sexual functions and then (c) postures within discourse as a *cause*, an interior essence which both produces and renders intelligible all manner of sensation, pleasure, and desire as sex-specific. In other words, bodily pleasures are not

merely causally reducible to this ostensibly sex-specific essence, but they become readily interpretable as manifestations or *signs* of this "sex."¹⁸

In opposition to this false construction of "sex" as both univocal and causal, Foucault engages a reverse-discourse which treats "sex" as an *effect* rather than an origin. In the place of "sex" as the original and continuous cause and signification of bodily pleasures, he proposes "sexuality" as an open and complex historical system of discourse and power that produces the misnomer of "sex" as part of a strategy to conceal and, hence, to perpetuate power-relations. One way in which power is both perpetuated and concealed is through the establishment of an external or arbitrary relation between power, conceived as repression or domination, and sex, conceived as a brave but thwarted energy waiting for release or authentic self-expression. The use of this juridical model presumes that the relation between power and sexuality is not only ontologically distinct, but that power always and only works to subdue or liberate a sex which is fundamentally intact, self-sufficient, and other than power itself. When "sex" is essentialized in this way, it becomes ontologically immunized from power relations and from its own historicity. As a result, the analysis of sexuality is collapsed into the analysis of "sex," and any inquiry into the historical production of the category of "sex" itself is precluded by this inverted and falsifying causality. According to Foucault, "sex" must not only be recontextualized within the terms of *sexuality*, but juridical power must be reconceived as a construction produced by a generative power which, in turn, conceals the mechanism of its own productivity.

the notion of sex brought about a fundamental reversal; it made it possible to invert the representation of the relationships of power to sexuality, causing the latter to appear, *not in its essential and positive relation to power*, but as being rooted in a specific and irreducible urgency which power tries as best it can to dominate. (154)

Foucault explicitly takes a stand against emancipatory or liberationist models of sexuality in *The History of Sexuality* because they subscribe to a juridical model that does not acknowledge the historical production of "sex" as a category, that is, as a mystifying "effect" of power relations. His ostensible problem with feminism seems also to emerge here: Where feminist analysis takes the category of sex and, thus, according to him, the binary restriction on gender, as its point

of departure, Foucault understands his own project to be an inquiry into how the category of "sex" and sexual difference are constructed within discourse as necessary features of bodily identity. The juridical model of law which structures the feminist emancipatory model presumes, in his view, that the subject of emancipation, "the sexed body" in some sense, is not itself in need of a critical deconstruction. As Foucault remarks about some humanist efforts at prison reform, the criminal subject who gets emancipated may be even more deeply shackled than the humanist originally thought. To be sexed, for Foucault, is to be subjected to a set of social regulations, to have the law that directs those regulations reside both as the formative principle of one's sex, gender, pleasures, and desires and as the hermeneutic principle of self-interpretation. The category of sex is thus inevitably regulative, and any analysis which makes that category presuppositional uncritically extends and further legitimates that regulative strategy as a power/knowledge regime.

In editing and publishing the journals of Herculine Barbin, Foucault is clearly trying to show how an hermaphroditic or intersexed body implicitly exposes and refutes the regulative strategies of sexual categorization. Because he thinks that "sex" unifies bodily functions and meanings that have no necessary relationship with one another, he predicts that the disappearance of "sex" results in a happy dispersal of these various functions, meanings, organs, somatic and physiological processes as well as in the proliferation of pleasures outside of the framework of intelligibility enforced by univocal sexes within a binary relation. The sexual world in which Herculine resides, according to Foucault, is one in which bodily pleasures do not immediately signify "sex" as their primary cause and ultimate meaning; it is a world, he claims, in which "grins hung about without the cat" (xiii). Indeed, these are pleasures that clearly transcend the regulation imposed upon them, and here we see Foucault's sentimental indulgence in the very emancipatory discourse his analysis in *The History of Sexuality* was meant to displace. According to this Foucaultian model of emancipatory sexual politics, the overthrow of "sex" results in the release of a primary sexual multiplicity, a notion not so far afield from the psychoanalytic postulation of primary polymorphousness or Marcuse's notion of an original and creative bisexual Eros subsequently repressed by an instrumentalist culture.

The significant difference between Foucault's position in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* and in his introduction to *Herculine Barbin* is already to be found as an unresolved tension within the

History of Sexuality itself (he refers there to "bucolic" and "innocent" pleasures of intergenerational sexual exchange that exist prior to the imposition of various regulative strategies [31]). On the one hand, Foucault wants to argue that there is no "sex" in itself which is not produced by complex interactions of discourse and power, and yet there does seem to be a "multiplicity of pleasures" *in itself* which is not the effect of any specific discourse/power exchange. In other words, Foucault invokes a trope of prediscursive libidinal multiplicity that effectively presupposes a sexuality "before the law," indeed, a sexuality waiting for emancipation from the shackles of "sex." On the other hand, Foucault officially insists that sexuality and power are coextensive and that we must not think that by saying yes to sex we say no to power. In his antijudicial and anti-emancipatory mode, the "official" Foucault argues that sexuality is always situated within matrices of power, that it is always produced or constructed within specific historical practices, both discursive and institutional, and that recourse to a sexuality before the law is an illusory and complicitous conceit of emancipatory sexual politics.

The journals of Herculine provide the opportunity to read Foucault against himself, or, perhaps more appropriately, to expose the constitutive contradiction of this kind of anti-emancipatory call for sexual freedom. Herculine, called Alexina throughout the text, narrates a story about h/er tragic plight as one who lives a life of unjust victimization, deceit, longing, and inevitable dissatisfaction. From the time s/he was a young girl, s/he reports, s/he was different from the other girls. This difference is a cause for alternating states of anxiety and self-importance through the story, but it is there as tacit knowledge before the law becomes an explicit actor in the story. Although Herculine does not report directly on h/er anatomy in the journals, the medical reports that Foucault publishes along with Herculine's own text suggest that Herculine might reasonably be said to have what is described as either a small penis or an enlarged clitoris, that where one might expect to find a vagina one finds a "cul-de-sac," as the doctors put it, and, further, that she doesn't appear to have identifiably female breasts. There seems also to be some capacity for ejaculation that is not fully accounted for within the medical documents. Herculine never refers to anatomy as such, but relates h/er predicament in terms of a natural mistake, a metaphysical homelessness, a state of insatiable desire, and a radical solitariness that, before h/er suicide, is transformed into a full-blown rage, first directed toward men, but finally toward the world as such.

Herculine relates in elliptical terms h/er relations with the girls at school, the "mothers" at the convent, and finally h/er most passionate

attachment with Sara who becomes h/er lover. Plagued first with guilt and then with some unspecified genital ailment, Herculine exposes h/er secret to a doctor and then a priest, a set of confessional acts that effectively force h/er separation from Sara. Authorities confer and effect h/er legal transformation into a man whereupon s/he is legally obligated to dress in men's clothing and to exercise the various rights of men in society. Written in a sentimental and melodramatic tone, the journals report a sense of perpetual crisis that culminates in suicide. One could argue that prior to the legal transformation of Alexina into a man, s/he was free to enjoy those pleasures that are effectively free of the juridical and regulatory pressures of the category of "sex." Indeed, Foucault appears to think that the journals provide insight into precisely that unregulated field of pleasures prior to the imposition of the law of univocal sex. His reading, however, constitutes a radical misreading of the way in which those pleasures are always already embedded in the pervasive but inarticulate law and, indeed, generated by the very law they are said to defy.

The temptation to romanticize Herculine's sexuality as the utopian play of pleasures prior to the imposition and restrictions of "sex" surely ought to be refused. It still remains possible, however, to ask the alternative Foucaultian question: What social practices and conventions produce sexuality in this form? In pursuing the question, we have, I think, the opportunity to understand something about (a) the productive capacity of power—that is, the way in which regulative strategies produce the subjects they come to subjugate; and (b) the specific mechanism by which power produces sexuality in the context of this autobiographical narrative. The question of sexual difference reemerges in a new light when we dispense with the metaphysical reification of multiplicitous sexuality and inquire in the case of Herculine into the concrete narrative structures and political and cultural conventions that produce and regulate the tender kisses, the diffuse pleasures, and the thwarted and transgressive thrills of Herculine's sexual world.

Among the various matrices of power that produce sexuality between Herculine and h/er partners are, clearly, the conventions of female homosexuality both encouraged and condemned by the convent and its supporting religious ideology. One thing about Herculine we know is that s/he reads, and reads a good deal, that h/er nineteenth-century French education involved schooling in the classics as well as French Romanticism, and that h/er own narrative takes place within an established set of literary conventions. Indeed, these conventions produce and interpret for us this sexuality that both Foucault and Her-

culine take to be outside of all convention. Romantic and sentimental narratives of impossible loves seem also to produce all manner of desire and suffering in this text, and so do Christian legends about ill-fated saints, Greek myths about suicidal androgynes, and, obviously, the Christ figure itself. Whether "before" the law as a multiplicitous sexuality or "outside" the law as an unnatural transgression, those positionings are invariably "inside" a discourse which produces sexuality and then conceals that production through a configuring of a courageous and rebellious sexuality "outside" of the text itself.

The effort to explain Herculine's sexual relations with young girls through recourse to the masculine component of h/er biological doubleness is, of course, the constant temptation of the text. If Herculine desires a girl, then perhaps there is evidence in hormonal or chromosomal structures or in the anatomical presence of the imperforate penis to suggest a more discrete, masculine sex that subsequently generates heterosexual capacity and desire. The pleasures, the desires, the acts—do they not in some sense emanate from the biological body, and is there not some way of understanding that emanation as both causally necessitated by that body and expressive of its sex-specificity?

Perhaps because Herculine's body is hermaphroditic, the struggle to separate conceptually the description of h/er primary sexual characteristics from h/er gender identity (h/er sense of h/er own gender which, by the way, is ever-shifting and far from clear) and the directionality and objects of h/er desire is especially difficult. S/he herself presumes at various points that h/er body is the *cause* of h/er gender confusion and h/er transgressive pleasures, as if they were both result and manifestation of an essence which somehow falls outside the natural/metaphysical order of things. But rather than understand h/er anomalous body as the cause of h/er desire, h/er trouble, h/er affairs and confession, we might read this body, here fully textualized, as a sign of an irresolvable ambivalence produced by the juridical discourse on univocal sex. In the place of univocity, we fail to discover multiplicity, as Foucault would have us do; instead, we confront a fatal ambivalence, produced by the prohibitive law, which for all its effects of happy dispersal nevertheless culminates in Herculine's suicide.

If one follows Herculine's narrative self-exposition, itself a kind of confessional production of the self, it seems that h/er sexual disposition is one of ambivalence from the outset, that h/er sexuality recapitulates the ambivalent structure of its production, construed in part as the institutional injunction to pursue the love of the various "sisters" and "mothers" of the extended convent family and the absolute prohibition against carrying that love too far. Foucault inadvertently

suggests that Herculine's "happy limbo of a non-identity" was made possible by an historically specific formation of sexuality, namely, "her sequestered existence among the almost exclusive company of women." This "strange happiness," as he describes it, was at once "obligatory and forbidden" within the confines of convent conventions. His clear suggestion here is that this homosexual environment, structured as it is by an eroticized taboo, was one in which this "happy limbo of a non-identity" is subtly promoted. Foucault then swiftly retracts the suggestion of Herculine as participating in a practice of female homosexual conventions, insisting that "non-identity" rather than a variety of female identities is at play. For Herculine to occupy the discursive position of "the female homosexual" would be for Foucault to engage the category of sex—precisely what Foucault wants Herculine's narrative to persuade us to reject.

But perhaps Foucault does want to have it both ways; indeed, he wants implicitly to suggest that nonidentity is what is produced in homosexual contexts—namely, that homosexuality is instrumental to the overthrow of the category of sex. Note in Foucault's following description of Herculine's pleasures how the category of sex is at once invoked and refused: The school and the convent "foster the tender pleasures that sexual nonidentity discovers and provokes when it goes astray in the midst of all those bodies that are similar to one another" (xiv). Here Foucault assumes that the likenesses of these bodies condition the happy limbo of their nonidentity, a difficult formulation to accept both logically and historically, but also as an adequate description of Herculine. Is it the awareness of their likeness that conditions the sexual play of the young women in the convent, or is it, rather, the eroticized presence of the law forbidding homosexuality that produces these transgressive pleasures in the compulsory mode of a confessional? Herculine maintains h/er own discourse of sexual difference even within this ostensibly homosexual context: s/he notes and enjoys h/er difference from the young women s/he desires, and yet this difference is not a simple reproduction of the heterosexual matrix for desire. S/he knows that her position in that exchange is transgressive, that she is a "usurper" of a masculine prerogative, as s/he puts it, and that s/he contests that privilege even as s/he replicates it.

The language of usurpation suggests a participation in the very categories from which s/he feels inevitably distanced, suggesting also the denaturalized and fluid possibilities of such categories once they are no longer linked causally or expressively to the presumed fixity of sex. Herculine's anatomy does not fall outside the categories of sex, but confuses and redistributes the constitutive elements of those

categories; indeed, the free play of attributes has the effect of exposing the illusory character of sex as an abiding substantive substrate to which these various attributes are presumed to adhere. Moreover, Herculine's sexuality constitutes a set of gender transgressions which challenge the very distinction between heterosexual and lesbian erotic exchange, underscoring the points of their ambiguous convergence and redistribution.

But it seems we are compelled to ask, is there not, even at the level of a discursively constituted sexual ambiguity, some questions of "sex" and, indeed, of its relation to "power" that set limits on the free play of sexual categories? In other words, how free is that play, whether conceived as a prediscursive libidinal multiplicity or as a discursively constituted multiplicity? Foucault's original objection to the category of sex is that it imposes the artifice of unity and univocity on a set of ontologically disparate sexual functions and elements. In an almost Rousseauian move, Foucault constructs the binary of an artificial cultural law that reduces and distorts what we might well understand as a *natural* heterogeneity. Herculine h/erself refers to h/er sexuality as "this incessant struggle of nature against reason" (103). A cursory examination of these disparate "elements," however, suggests their thorough medicalization as "functions," "sensations," even "drives." Hence, the heterogeneity to which Foucault appeals is itself constituted by the very medical discourse that he positions as the repressive juridical law. But what is this heterogeneity that Foucault seems to prize, and what purpose does it serve?

If Foucault contends that sexual nonidentity is promoted in homosexual contexts, he would seem to identify heterosexual contexts as precisely those in which identity is constituted. We know already that he understands the category of sex and of identity generally to be the effect and instrument of a regulatory sexual regime, but it is less clear whether that regulation is reproductive or heterosexual, or something else. Does that regulation of sexuality produce male and female identities within a symmetrical binary relation? If homosexuality produces sexual nonidentity, then homosexuality itself no longer relies on identities being *like* one another; indeed, homosexuality could no longer be described as such. But if homosexuality is meant to designate the place of an *unnameable* libidinal heterogeneity, perhaps we can ask whether this is, instead, a love that either cannot or dare not speak its name? In other words, Foucault, who gave only one interview on homosexuality and has always resisted the confessional moment in his own work, nevertheless presents Herculine's confession to us in an unabashedly didactic mode. Is this a displaced confession that presumes a continuity or parallel between his life and hers?

On the cover of the French edition, he remarks that Plutarch understood illustrious persons to constitute *parallel* lives which in some sense travel infinite lines that eventually meet in eternity. He remarks that there are some lives that veer off the track of infinity and threaten to disappear into an obscurity that can never be recovered—lives that do not follow the “straight” path, as it were, into an eternal community of greatness, but deviate and threaten to become fully irrecoverable. “That would be the inverse of Plutarch,” he writes, “lives at parallel points that nothing can bring back together” (my translation). Here the textual reference is most clearly to the separation of Herculine, the adopted male name (though with a curiously feminine ending), and Alexina, the name that designated Herculine in the female mode. But it is also a reference to Herculine and Sara, h/er lover, who are quite literally separated and whose paths quite obviously diverge. But perhaps Herculine is in some sense also parallel to Foucault, parallel precisely in the sense in which divergent lifelines, which are in no sense “straight,” might well be. Indeed, perhaps Herculine and Foucault are parallel, not in any literal sense, but in their very contestation of the literal as such, especially as it applies to the categories of sex.

Foucault’s suggestion in the preface that there are bodies which are in some sense “similar” to each other disregards the hermaphroditic distinctness of Herculine’s body, as well as h/er own presentation of h/erself as very much unlike the women s/he desires. Indeed, after some manner of sexual exchange, Herculine engages the language of appropriation and triumph, avowing Sara as her eternal property when she remarks, “From that moment on, Sara belonged to me . . . !!!” (51). So why would Foucault resist the very text that he wants to use in order to make such a claim? In the one interview Foucault gave on homosexuality, James O’Higgins, the interviewer, remarks that “there is a growing tendency in American intellectual circles, particularly among radical feminists, to distinguish between male and female homosexuality,” a position, he argues, that claims that very different things happen physically in the two sorts of encounters and that lesbians tend to prefer monogamy and the like while gay men generally do not. Foucault responds by laughing, suggested by the bracketed “[Laughs],” and he says, “All I can do is explode with laughter.”¹⁹ This explosive laughter, we may remember, also followed Foucault’s reading of Borges, reported in the preface to *The Order of Things (Les mots et les choses)*:

This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of

my thought . . . breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other.²⁰

The passage is, of course, from the Chinese encyclopedia which confounds the Aristotelian distinction between universal categories and particular instances. But there is also the “shattering laughter” of Pierre Rivière whose murderous destruction of his family, or, perhaps, for Foucault, of *the* family, seems quite literally to negate the categories of kinship and, by extension, of sex.²¹ And there is, of course, Bataille’s now famous laughter which, Derrida tells us in *Writing and Difference*, designates that excess that escapes the conceptual mastery of Hegel’s dialectic.²² Foucault, then, seems to laugh precisely because the question instates the very binary that he seeks to displace, that dreary binary of Same and Other that has plagued not only the legacy of dialectics, but the dialectic of sex as well. But then there is, of course, the laugh of Medusa, which, Hélène Cixous tells us, shatters the placid surface constituted by the petrifying gaze and which exposes the dialectic of Same and Other as taking place through the axis of sexual difference.²³ In a gesture that resonates self-consciously with the tale of Medusa, Herculine h/erself writes of “the cold fixity of my gaze [that] seems to freeze” (105) those who encounter it.

But it is, of course, Irigaray who exposes this dialectic of Same and Other as a false binary, the illusion of a symmetrical difference which consolidates the metaphysical economy of phallogocentrism, the economy of the same. In her view, the Other as well as the Same are marked as masculine; the Other is but the negative elaboration of the masculine subject with the result that the female sex is unrepresentable—that is, it is the sex which, within this signifying economy, is not one. But it is not one also in the sense that it eludes the univocal signification characteristic of the Symbolic, and because it is not a substantive identity, but always and only an undetermined relation of difference to the economy which renders it absent. It is not “one” in the sense that it is multiple and diffuse in its pleasures and its signifying mode. Indeed, perhaps Herculine’s apparently multiplicitous pleasures would qualify for the mark of the feminine in its polyvalence and in its refusal to submit to the reductive efforts of univocal signification.

But let us not forget Herculine’s relation to the laugh which seems to appear twice, first in the fear of being laughed *at* (23) and later as a laugh of scorn that s/he directs against the doctor, for whom s/he

loses respect after he fails to tell the appropriate authorities of the natural irregularity that has been revealed to him (71). For Herculine, then, laughter appears to designate either humiliation or scorn, two positions unambiguously related to a damning law, subjected to it either as its instrument or object. Herculine does not fall outside the jurisdiction of that law; even h/er exile is understood on the model of the punishment. On the very first page, s/he reports that h/er “place was not marked out [*pas marquée*] in this world that shunned me.” And s/he articulates the early sense of abjection that is later enacted first as a devoted daughter or lover to be likened to a “dog” or a “slave” and then finally in a full and fatal form as s/he is expelled and expels h/erself from the domain of all human beings. From this presuicidal isolation, s/he claims to soar above both sexes, but h/er anger is most fully directed against men, whose “title” s/he sought to usurp in h/er intimacy with Sara and whom s/he now indicts without restraint as those who somehow forbid h/er the possibility of love.

At the beginning of the narrative, s/he offers two one-sentence paragraphs “parallel” to one another which suggest a melancholic incorporation of the lost father, a postponement of the anger of abandonment through the structural instatement of that negativity into h/er identity and desire. Before s/he tells us that s/he h/erself was abandoned by h/er mother quickly and without advance notice, s/he tells us that for reasons unstated s/he spent a few years in a house for abandoned and orphaned children. S/he refers to the “poor creatures, deprived from their cradle of a mother’s love.” In the next sentence s/he refers to this institution as a “refuge [*asile*] of suffering and affliction,” and in the following sentence refers to h/er father “whom a sudden death tore away . . . from the tender affection of my mother” (4). Although h/er own abandonment is twice deflected here through the pity for others who are suddenly rendered motherless, s/he establishes an identification through that deflection, one that later reappears as the joint plight of father and daughter cut off from the maternal caress. The deflections of desire are semantically compounded, as it were, as Herculine proceeds to fall in love with “mother” after “mother” and then falls in love with various mothers’ “daughters,” which scandalizes all manner of mother. Indeed, s/he vacillates between being the object of everyone’s adoration and excitement and an object of scorn and abandonment, the split consequence of a melancholic structure left to feed on itself without intervention. If melancholy involves self-recrimination, as Freud argues, and if that recrimination is a kind of negative narcissism (attending to the self, even if only in the mode of berating that self), then Herculine can be understood to be constantly falling into the opposition between

negative and positive narcissism, at once avowing h/erself as the most abandoned and neglected creature on earth but also as the one who casts a spell of enchantment on everyone who comes near h/er, indeed, one who is better for all women than any “man” (107).

S/he refers to the hospital for orphaned children as that early “refuge of suffering,” an abode that s/he figuratively reencounters at the close of the narrative as the “refuge of the tomb.” Just as that early refuge provides a magical communion and identification with the phantom father, so the tomb of death is already occupied by the very father whom s/he hopes death will let h/er meet: “The sight of the tomb reconciles me to life,” she writes. “It makes me feel an indefinable tenderness for the one whose bones are lying there beneath my feet [*là à mes pieds*]” (109). But this love, formulated as a kind of solidarity against the abandoning mother, is itself in no way purified of the anger of abandonment: The father “beneath [h/er] feet” is earlier enlarged to become the totality of men over whom s/he soars, and whom s/he claims to dominate (107), and toward whom s/he directs h/er laugh of disdain. Earlier s/he remarks about the doctor who discovered h/er anomalous condition, “I wished he were a hundred feet underground!” (69).

Herculine’s ambivalence here implies the limits of Foucault’s theory of the “happy limbo of a non-identity.” Almost prefiguring the place Herculine will assume for Foucault, s/he wonders whether s/he is not “the plaything of an impossible dream” (79). Herculine’s sexual disposition is one of ambivalence from the outset, and, as argued earlier, h/er sexuality recapitulates the ambivalent structure of its production, construed in part as the institutional injunction to pursue the love of the various “sisters” and “mothers” of the extended convent family and the absolute prohibition against carrying that love too far. H/er sexuality is not outside the law, but is the ambivalent production of the law, one in which the very notion of *prohibition* spans the psychoanalytic and institutional terrains. H/er confessions, as well as h/er desires, are subjection and defiance at once. In other words, the love prohibited by death or abandonment, or both, is a love that takes prohibition to be its condition and its aim.

After submitting to the law, Herculine becomes a juridically sanctioned subject as a “man,” and yet the gender category proves less fluid than h/er own references to Ovid’s *Metaphormoses* suggest. H/er heteroglossic discourse challenges the viability of the notion of a “person” who might be said to preexist gender or exchange one gender for the other. If s/he is not actively condemned by others, s/he condemns h/erself (even calls h/erself a “judge” [106]), revealing that the juridical law in effect is much greater than the empirical law that

effects h/er gender conversion. Indeed, Herculine can never embody that law precisely because s/he cannot provide the occasion by which that law naturalizes itself in the symbolic structures of anatomy. In other words, the law is not simply a cultural imposition on an otherwise natural heterogeneity; the law requires conformity to its own notion of "nature" and gains its legitimacy through the binary and asymmetrical naturalization of bodies in which the Phallus, though clearly not identical with the penis, nevertheless deploys the penis as its naturalized instrument and sign.

Herculine's pleasures and desires are in no way the bucolic innocence that thrives and proliferates prior to the imposition of a juridical law. Neither does s/he fully fall outside the signifying economy of masculinity. S/he is "outside" the law, but the law maintains this "outside" within itself. In effect, s/he embodies the law, not as an entitled subject, but as an enacted testimony to the law's uncanny capacity to produce only those rebellions that it can guarantee will—out of fidelity—defeat themselves and those subjects who, utterly subjected, have no choice but to reiterate the law of their genesis.

Concluding Unscientific Postscript

Within *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, Foucault appears to locate the quest for identity within the context of juridical forms of power that become fully articulate with the advent of the sexual sciences, including psychoanalysis, toward the end of the nineteenth-century. Although Foucault revised his historiography of sex at the outset of *The Use of Pleasure (L'Usage des plaisirs)* and sought to discover the repressive/generative rules of subject-formation in early Greek and Roman texts, his philosophical project to expose the regulatory production of identity-effects remained constant. A contemporary example of this quest for identity can be found in recent developments in cell biology, an example that inadvertently confirms the continuing applicability of a Foucaultian critique.

One place to interrogate the univocity of sex is the recent controversy over the master gene that researchers at MIT in late 1987 claim to have discovered as the secret and certain determinant of sex. With the use of highly sophisticated technological means, the master gene, which constitutes a specific DNA sequence on the Y chromosome, was discovered by Dr. David Page and his colleagues and named "TDF" or testis-determining factor. In the publication of his findings in *Cell* (No. 51), Dr. Page claimed to have discovered "the binary switch upon which hinges all sexually dimorphic characteristics."²⁴ Let us then consider

the claims of this discovery and see why the unsettling questions regarding the decidability of sex continue to be asked.

According to Page's article, "The Sex-Determining Region of the Human Y Chromosome Encodes a Finger Protein," samples of DNA were taken from a highly unusual group of people, some of whom had XX chromosomes, but had been medically designated as males, and some of whom had XY chromosomal constitution, but had been medically designated as female. He does not tell us exactly on what basis they had been designated contrary to the chromosomal findings, but we are left to presume that obvious primary and secondary characteristics suggested that those were, indeed, the appropriate designations. Page and his coworkers made the following hypothesis: There must be some stretch of DNA, which cannot be seen under the usual microscopic conditions, that determines the male sex, and this stretch of DNA must have been moved somehow from the Y chromosome, its usual location, to some other chromosome, where one would not expect to find it. Only if we could presume (a) this undetectable DNA sequence and (b) prove its translocatability, could we understand why it is that an XX male had no detectable Y chromosome, but was, in fact, still male. Similarly, we could explain the curious presence of the Y chromosome on females precisely because that stretch of DNA had somehow been misplaced.

Although the pool that Page and his researchers used to come up with this finding was limited, the speculation on which they base their research, in part, is that a good ten percent of the population has chromosomal variations that do not fit neatly into the XX-female and XY-male set of categories. Hence, the discovery of the "master-gene" is considered to be a more certain basis for understanding sex-determination and, hence, sex-difference, than previous chromosomal criteria could provide.

Unfortunately for Page, there was one persistent problem that haunted the claims made on behalf of the discovery of the DNA sequence. Exactly the same stretch of DNA said to determine maleness was, in fact, found to be present on the X chromosomes of females. Page first responded to this curious discovery by claiming that perhaps it was not the *presence* of the gene sequence in males versus its *absence* in females that was determining, but that it was *active* in males and *passive* in females (Aristotle lives!). But this suggestion remains hypothetical and, according to Anne Fausto-Sterling, Page and his coworkers failed to mention in that *Cell* article that the individuals from whom the gene samples were taken were far from unambiguous in their anatomical and reproductive constitutions. I quote from her article, "Life in the XY Corral":

the four XX males whom they studied were all sterile (no sperm production), had small testes which totally lacked germ cells, i.e., precursor cells for sperms. They also had high hormone levels and low testosterone levels. Presumably they were classified as males because of their external genitalia and the presence of testes. . . . Similarly . . . both of the XY females' external genitalia were normal, [but] their ovaries lacked germ cells. (328)

Clearly these are cases in which the component parts of sex do not add up to the recognizable coherence or unity that is usually designated by the category of sex. This incoherence troubles Page's argument as well, for it is unclear why we should agree at the outset that these *are* XX-males and XY-females, when it is precisely the designation of male and female that is under question and that is implicitly already decided by the recourse to external genitalia. Indeed, if external genitalia were sufficient as a criterion by which to determine or assign sex, then the experimental research into the master gene would hardly be necessary at all.

But consider a different kind of problem with the way in which that particular hypothesis is formulated, tested, and validated. Notice that Page and his coworkers conflate sex-determination with male-determination, and with testis-determination. Geneticists Eva Eicher and Linda L. Washburn in the *Annual Review of Genetics* suggest that ovary-determination is never considered in the literature on sex-determination and that femaleness is always conceptualized in terms of the absence of the male-determining factor or of the passive presence of that factor. As absent or passive, it is definitionally disqualified as an object of study. Eicher and Washburn suggest, however, that it *is* active and that a cultural prejudice, indeed, a set of gendered assumptions about sex, and about what might make such an inquiry valuable, skew and limit the research into sex-determination. Fausto-Sterling quotes Eicher and Washburn:

Some investigators have overemphasized the hypothesis that the Y chromosome is involved in testis-determination by presenting the induction of testicular tissue as an active, (gene-directed, dominant) event while presenting the induction of ovarian tissue as a passive (automatic) event. Certainly, the induction of ovarian tissue is as much an active, genetically directed developmental process as the induction of testicular tissue, or for that matter, the induction of any cellular differentiation process. Almost nothing has been written about genes involved in the induction of ovarian tissue from the undifferentiated gonad. (325)

In related fashion, the entire field of embryology has come under criticism for its focus on the central role of the nucleus in cell differentiation. Feminist critics of the field of molecular cell biology have argued against its nucleocentric assumptions. As opposed to a research orientation that seeks to establish the nucleus of a fully differentiated cell as the master or director of the development of a complete and well-formed new organism, a research program is suggested that would reconceive the nucleus as something which gains its meaning and control only within its cellular context. According to Fausto-Sterling, "the question to ask is not how a cell nucleus changes during differentiation, but, rather, how the dynamic nuclear-cytoplasmic interactions alter during differentiation." (323-24)

The structure of Page's inquiry fits squarely within the general trends of molecular cell biology. The framework suggests a refusal from the outset to consider that these individuals implicitly challenge the descriptive force of the available categories of sex; the question he pursues is that of how the "binary switch" gets started, not whether the description of bodies in terms of binary sex is adequate to the task at hand. Moreover, the concentration on the "master gene" suggests that femaleness ought to be understood as the presence or absence of maleness or, at best, the presence of a passivity that, in men, would invariably be active. This claim is, of course, made within the research context in which active ovarian contributions to sex differentiation have never been strongly considered. The conclusion here is not that valid and demonstrable claims cannot be made about sex-determination, but rather that cultural assumptions regarding the relative status of men and women and the binary relation of gender itself frame and focus the research into sex-determination. The task of distinguishing sex from gender becomes all the more difficult once we understand that gendered meanings frame the hypothesis and the reasoning of those biomedical inquiries that seek to establish "sex" for us as it is prior to the cultural meanings that it acquires. Indeed, the task is even more complicated when we realize that the language of biology participates in other kinds of languages and reproduces that cultural sedimentation in the objects it purports to discover and neutrally describe.

Is it not a purely cultural convention to which Page and others refer when they decide that an anatomically ambiguous XX individual is male, a convention that takes genitalia to be the definitive "sign" of sex? One might argue that the discontinuities in these instances cannot be resolved through recourse to a single determinant and that sex, as a category that comprises a variety of elements, functions, and chromosomal and hormonal dimensions, no longer operates within

the binary framework that we take for granted. The point here is not to seek recourse to the exceptions, the bizarre, in order merely to relativize the claims made in behalf of normal sexual life. As Freud suggests in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, however, it is the exception, the strange, that gives us the clue to how the mundane and taken-for-granted world of sexual meanings is constituted. Only from a self-consciously denaturalized position can we see how the appearance of naturalness is itself constituted. The presuppositions that we make about sexed bodies, about them being one or the other, about the meanings that are said to inhere in them or to follow from being sexed in such a way are suddenly and significantly upset by those examples that fail to comply with the categories that naturalize and stabilize that field of bodies for us within the terms of cultural conventions. Hence, the strange, the incoherent, that which falls “outside,” gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of sexual categorization as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might well be constructed differently.

Although we may not immediately agree with the analysis that Foucault supplies—namely, that the category of sex is constructed in the service of a system of regulatory and reproductive sexuality—it is interesting to note that Page designates the external genitalia, those anatomical parts essential to the symbolization of reproductive sexuality, as the unambiguous and *a priori* determinants of sex assignment. One might well argue that Page’s inquiry is beset by two discourses that, in this instance, conflict: the cultural discourse that takes external genitalia to be the sure signs of sex, and does that in the service of reproductive interests, and the discourse that seeks to establish the male principle as active and monocausal, if not autogenetic. The desire to determine sex once and for all, and to determine it as one sex rather than the other, thus seems to issue from the social organization of sexual reproduction through the construction of the clear and unequivocal identities and positions of sexed bodies with respect to each other.

Because within the framework of reproductive sexuality the male body is usually figured as the active agent, the problem with Page’s inquiry is, in a sense, to reconcile the discourse of reproduction with the discourse of masculine activity, two discourses that usually work together culturally, but in this instance have come apart. Interesting, then, is Page’s willingness to settle on the active DNA sequence as the last word, in effect giving the principle of masculine activity priority over the discourse of reproduction.

This priority, however, would constitute only an appearance, according to the theory of Monique Wittig. The category of sex belongs

to a system of compulsory heterosexuality that clearly operates through a system of compulsory sexual reproduction. In Wittig’s view, to which we now turn, “masculine” and “feminine,” “male” and “female” exist *only* within the heterosexual matrix; indeed, they are the naturalized terms that keep that matrix concealed and, hence, protected from a radical critique.

iii. Monique Wittig: Bodily Disintegration and Fictive Sex

Language casts sheaves of reality upon the social body—Monique Wittig

Simone de Beauvoir wrote in *The Second Sex* that “one is not born a woman, but rather *becomes* one.” The phrase is odd, even nonsensical, for how can one become a woman if one wasn’t a woman all along? And who is this “one” who does the becoming? Is there some human who becomes its gender at some point in time? Is it fair to assume that this human was not its gender before it became its gender? How does one “become” a gender? What is the moment or mechanism of gender construction? And, perhaps most pertinently, when does this mechanism arrive on the cultural scene to transform the human subject into a gendered subject?

Are there ever humans who are not, as it were, always already gendered? The mark of gender appears to “qualify” bodies as human bodies; the moment in which an infant becomes humanized is when the question, “is it a boy or girl?” is answered. Those bodily figures who do not fit into either gender fall outside the human, indeed, constitute the domain of the dehumanized and the abject against which the human itself is constituted. If gender is always there, delimiting in advance what qualifies as the human, how can we speak of a human who becomes its gender, as if gender were a postscript or a cultural afterthought?

Beauvoir, of course, meant merely to suggest that the category of women is a variable cultural accomplishment, a set of meanings that are taken on or taken up within a cultural field, and that no one is born with a gender—gender is always acquired. On the other hand, Beauvoir was willing to affirm that one is born with a sex, as a sex, sexed, and that being sexed and being human are coextensive and simultaneous; sex is an analytic attribute of the human; there is no human who is not sexed; sex qualifies the human as a necessary attribute. But sex does not cause gender, and gender cannot be understood to reflect or express sex; indeed, for Beauvoir, sex is immutably factic, but gender acquired, and whereas sex cannot be changed—or so she thought—gender is the variable cultural construction of sex,

the myriad and open possibilities of cultural meaning occasioned by a sexed body.

Beauvoir's theory implied seemingly radical consequences, ones that she herself did not entertain. For instance, if sex and gender are radically distinct, then it does not follow that to be a given sex is to become a given gender; in other words, "woman" need not be the cultural construction of the female body, and "man" need not interpret male bodies. This radical formulation of the sex/gender distinction suggests that sexed bodies can be the occasion for a number of different genders, and further, that gender itself need not be restricted to the usual two. If sex does not limit gender, then perhaps there are genders, ways of culturally interpreting the sexed body, that are in no way restricted by the apparent duality of sex. Consider the further consequence that if gender is something that one becomes—but can never be—then gender is itself a kind of becoming or activity, and that gender ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing or a static cultural marker, but rather as an incessant and repeated action of some sort. If gender is not tied to sex, either causally or expressively, then gender is a kind of action that can potentially proliferate beyond the binary limits imposed by the apparent binary of sex. Indeed, gender would be a kind of cultural/corporeal action that requires a new vocabulary that institutes and proliferates present participles of various kinds, resignifiable and expansive categories that resist both the binary and substantializing grammatical restrictions on gender. But how would such a project become culturally conceivable and avoid the fate of an impossible and vain utopian project?

"One is not born a woman." Monique Wittig echoed that phrase in an article by the same name, published in *Feminist Issues* (1:1). But what sort of echo and re-presentation of Beauvoir does Monique Wittig offer? Two of her claims both recall Beauvoir and set Wittig apart from her: one, that the category of sex is neither invariant nor natural, but is a specifically political use of the category of nature that serves the purposes of reproductive sexuality. In other words, there is no reason to divide up human bodies into male and female sexes except that such a division suits the economic needs of heterosexuality and lends a naturalistic gloss to the institution of heterosexuality. Hence, for Wittig, there is no distinction between sex and gender; the category of "sex" is itself a *gendered* category, fully politically invested, naturalized but not natural. The second rather counter-intuitive claim that Wittig makes is the following: a lesbian is not a woman. A woman, she argues, only exists as a term that stabilizes and consolidates a binary and oppositional relation to a man; that relation, she argues, is heterosexu-

ality. A lesbian, she claims, in refusing heterosexuality is no longer defined in terms of that oppositional relation. Indeed, a lesbian, she maintains, transcends the binary opposition between woman and man; a lesbian is neither a woman nor a man. But further, a lesbian has no sex; she is beyond the categories of sex. Through the lesbian refusal of those categories, the lesbian exposes (pronouns are a problem here) the contingent cultural constitution of those categories and the tacit yet abiding presumption of the heterosexual matrix. Hence, for Wittig, we might say, one is not born a woman, one becomes one; but further, one is not born female, one *becomes female*; but even more radically, one can, if one chooses, become neither female nor male, woman nor man. Indeed, the lesbian appears to be a third gender or, as I shall show, a category that radically problematizes both sex and gender as stable political categories of description.

Wittig argues that the linguistic discrimination of "sex" secures the political and cultural operation of compulsory heterosexuality. This *relation* of heterosexuality, she argues, is neither reciprocal nor binary in the usual sense; "sex" is always already female, and there is only one sex, the feminine. To be male is not to be "sexed;" to be "sexed" is always a way of becoming particular and relative, and males within this system participate in the form of the universal person. For Wittig, then, the "female sex" does not imply some other sex, as in a "male sex;" the "female sex" implies only itself, enmeshed, as it were, in sex, trapped in what Beauvoir called the circle of immanence. Because "sex" is a political and cultural interpretation of the body, there is no sex/gender distinction along conventional lines; gender is built into sex, and sex proves to have been gender from the start. Wittig argues that within this set of compulsory social relations, women become ontologically suffused with sex; they *are* their sex, and, conversely, sex is necessarily feminine.

Wittig understands "sex" to be discursively produced and circulated by a system of significations oppressive to women, gays, and lesbians. She refuses to take part in this signifying system or to believe in the viability of taking up a reformist or subversive position within the system; to invoke a part of it is to invoke and confirm the entirety of it. As a result, the political task she formulates is to overthrow the entire discourse on sex, indeed, to overthrow the very grammar that institutes "gender"—or "fictive sex"—as an essential attribute of humans and objects alike (especially pronounced in French).²⁵ Through her theory and fiction she calls for a radical reorganization of the description of bodies and sexualities without recourse to sex and, consequently, without recourse to the pronomial differentiations that regulate and distribute rights of speech within the matrix of gender.

Wittig understands discursive categories like “sex” as abstractions forcibly imposed upon the social field, ones that produce a second-order or reified “reality.” Although it appears that individuals have a “direct perception” of sex, taken as an objective datum of experience, Wittig argues that such an object has been violently shaped into such a datum and that the history and mechanism of that violent shaping no longer appears with that object.²⁶ Hence, “sex” is the reality-effect of a violent process that is concealed by that very effect. All that appears is “sex,” and so “sex” is perceived to be the totality of what is, uncaused, but only because the cause is nowhere to be seen. Wittig realizes that her position is counterintuitive, but the political cultivation of intuition is precisely what she wants to elucidate, expose, and challenge:

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,” which reinterprets physical features (in themselves as neutral as others but marked by a social system), through the network of relationships in which they are perceived.²⁷

“Physical features” appear to be in some sense *there* on the far side of language, unmarked by a social system. It is unclear, however, that these features could be named in a way that would not reproduce the reductive operation of the categories of sex. These numerous features gain social meaning and unification through their articulation within the category of sex. In other words, “sex” imposes an artificial unity on an otherwise discontinuous set of attributes. As both *discursive* and *perceptual*, “sex” denotes an historically contingent epistemic regime, a language that forms perception by forcibly shaping the interrelationships through which physical bodies are perceived.

Is there a “physical” body prior to the perceptually perceived body? An impossible question to decide. Not only is the gathering of attributes under the category of sex suspect, but so is the very discrimination of the “features” themselves. That penis, vagina, breasts, and so forth, are *named* sexual parts is both a restriction of the erogenous body to those parts and a fragmentation of the body as a whole. Indeed, the “unity” imposed upon the body by the category of sex is a “disunity,” a fragmentation and compartmentalization, and a reduction of erotogeneity. No wonder, then, that Wittig textually enacts the “overthrow” of the category of sex through a destruction and fragmentation of the sexed body in *The Lesbian Body*. As “sex”

fragments the body, so the lesbian overthrow of “sex” targets as models of domination those sexually differentiated norms of bodily integrity that dictate what “unifies” and renders coherent the body as a sexed body. In her theory and fiction, Wittig shows that the “integrity” and “unity” of the body, often thought to be positive ideals, serve the purposes of fragmentation, restriction, and domination.

Language gains the power to create “the socially real” through the locutionary acts of speaking subjects. There appear to be two levels of reality, two orders of ontology, in Wittig’s theory. Socially constituted ontology emerges from a more fundamental ontology that appears to be pre-social and pre-discursive. Whereas “sex” belongs to a discursively constituted reality (second-order), there is a pre-social ontology that accounts for the constitution of the discursive itself. She clearly refuses the structuralist assumption of a set of universal signifying structures prior to the speaking subject that orchestrate the formation of that subject and his or her speech. In her view, there are historically contingent structures characterized as heterosexual and compulsory that distribute the rights of full and authoritative speech to males and deny them to females. But this socially constituted asymmetry disguises and violates a pre-social ontology of unified and equal persons.

The task for women, Wittig argues, is to assume the position of the authoritative, speaking subject—which is in some sense their ontologically grounded “right”—and to overthrow both the category of sex and the system of compulsory heterosexuality that is its origin. Language, for Wittig, is a set of acts, repeated over time, that produce reality-effects that are eventually misperceived as “facts.” Collectively considered, the repeated practice of naming sexual difference has created this appearance of natural division. The “naming” of sex is an act of domination and compulsion, an institutionalized performative that both creates and legislates social reality by requiring the discursive/perceptual construction of bodies in accord with principles of sexual difference. Hence, Wittig concludes, “we are compelled in our bodies and our minds to correspond, feature by feature, with the idea of nature that has been established for us . . . ‘men’ and ‘women’ are political categories, and not natural facts.”²⁸

“Sex,” the category, compels “sex,” the social configuration of bodies, through what Wittig calls a coerced contract. Hence, the category of “sex” is a name that enslaves. Language “casts sheaves of reality upon the social body,” but these sheaves are not easily discarded. She continues: “stamping it and violently shaping it.”²⁹ Wittig argues that the “straight mind,” evident in the discourses

of the human sciences, “oppress all of us, lesbians, women, and homosexual men” because they “take for granted that what founds society, any society, is heterosexuality.”³⁰ Discourse becomes oppressive when it requires that the speaking subject, in order to speak, participate in the very terms of that oppression—that is, take for granted the speaking subject’s own impossibility or unintelligibility. This presumptive heterosexuality, she argues, functions within discourse to communicate a threat: “‘you-will-be-straight-or-you-will-not-be.’”³¹ Women, lesbians, and gay men, she argues, cannot assume the position of the speaking subject within the linguistic system of compulsory heterosexuality. To speak within the system is to be deprived of the possibility of speech; hence, to speak at all in that context is a performative contradiction, the linguistic assertion of a self that cannot “be” within the language that asserts it.

The power Wittig accords to this “system” of language is enormous. Concepts, categories, and abstractions, she argues, can effect a physical and material violence against the bodies they claim to organize and interpret: “There is nothing abstract about the power that sciences and theories have to act materially and actually upon our bodies and minds, even if the discourse that produces it is abstract. It is one of the forms of domination, its very expression, as Marx said. I would say, rather, one of its exercises. All of the oppressed know this power and have had to deal with it.”³² The power of language to work on bodies is both the cause of sexual oppression and the way beyond that oppression. Language works neither magically nor inexorably: “there is a plasticity of the real to language: language has a plastic action upon the real.”³³ Language assumes and alters its power to act upon the real through locutionary acts, which, repeated, become entrenched practices and, ultimately, institutions. The asymmetrical structure of language that identifies the subject who speaks for and as the universal with the male and identifies the female speaker as “particular” and “interested” is in no sense intrinsic to particular languages or to language itself. These asymmetrical positions cannot be understood to follow from the “nature” of men or women, for, as Beauvoir established, no such “nature” exists: “One must understand that men are not born with a faculty for the universal and that women are not reduced at birth to the particular. The universal has been, and is continually, at every moment, appropriated by men. It does not happen, it must be done. It is an act, a criminal act, perpetrated by one class against another. It is an act carried out at the level of concepts, philosophy, politics.”³⁴

Although Irigaray argues that “the subject is always already masculine,” Wittig disputes the notion that “the subject” is exclusively

masculine territory. The very plasticity of language, for her, resists the fixing of the subject position as masculine. Indeed, the presumption of an absolute speaking subject is, for Wittig, the political goal for “women,” which, if achieved, will effectively dissolve the category of “women” altogether. A woman cannot use the first person “I” because *as a woman*, the speaker is “particular” (relative, interested, perspectival), and the invocation of the “I” presumes the capacity to speak for and as the universal human: “a relative subject is inconceivable, a relative subject could not speak at all.”³⁵ Relying on the assumption that all speaking presupposes and implicitly invokes the entirety of language, Wittig describes the speaking subject as one who, in the act of saying “I,” “reappropriates language as a whole, proceeding from oneself alone, with the power to use all language.” This absolute grounding of the speaking “I” assumes god-like dimensions within Wittig’s discussion. This privilege to speak “I” establishes a sovereign self, a center of absolute plenitude and power; speaking establishes “the supreme act of subjectivity.” This coming into subjectivity is the effective overthrow of sex and, hence, the feminine: “no woman can say *I* without being for herself a total subject—that is, ungendered, universal, whole.”³⁶

Wittig continues with a startling speculation on the nature of language and “being” that situates her own political project within the traditional discourse of ontotheology. In her view, the primary ontology of language gives every person the same opportunity to establish subjectivity. The practical task that women face in trying to establish subjectivity through speech depends on their collective ability to cast off the reifications of sex imposed on them which deform them as partial or relative beings. Since this discarding follows upon the exercise of a full invocation of “I,” women *speak* their way out of their gender. The social reifications of sex can be understood to mask or distort a prior ontological reality, that reality being the equal opportunity of all persons, prior to the marking by sex, to exercise language in the assertion of subjectivity. In speaking, the “I” assumes the totality of language and, hence, speaks potentially from all positions—that is, in a universal mode. “Gender . . . works upon this ontological fact to annul it,” she writes, assuming the primary principle of equal access to the universal to qualify as that “ontological fact.”³⁷ This principle of equal access, however, is itself grounded in an ontological presumption of the unity of speaking beings in a Being that is prior to sexed being. Gender, she argues, “tries to accomplish the division of Being,” but “Being as being is not divided.”³⁸ Here the coherent assertion of the “I” presupposes not only the totality of language, but the unity of being.

If nowhere else quite so plainly, Wittig places herself here within the traditional discourse of the philosophical pursuit of presence, Being, radical and uninterrupted plenitude. In distinction from a Derridean position that would understand all signification to rely on an operational *différance*, Wittig argues that speaking requires and invokes a seamless identity of all things. This foundationalist fiction gives her a point of departure by which to criticize existing social institutions. The critical question remains, however, what contingent social relations does that presumption of being, authority, and universal subjecthood serve? Why value the usurpation of that authoritarian notion of the subject? Why not pursue the decentering of the subject and its universalizing epistemic strategies? Although Wittig criticizes “the straight mind” for universalizing its point of view, it appears that she not only universalizes “the” straight mind, but fails to consider the totalitarian consequences of such a theory of sovereign speech acts.

Politically, the division of being—a violence against the field of ontological plenitude, in her view—into the distinction between the universal and the particular conditions a relation of subjection. Domination must be understood as the denial of a prior and primary unity of all persons in a prelinguistic being. Domination occurs through a language which, in its plastic social action, creates a second-order, artificial ontology, an illusion of difference, disparity, and, consequently, hierarchy that *becomes* social reality.

Paradoxically, Wittig nowhere entertains an Aristophanic myth about the original unity of genders, for gender is a divisive principle, a tool of subjection, one that resists the very notion of unity. Significantly, her novels follow a narrative strategy of *disintegration*, suggesting that the binary formulation of sex needs to fragment and proliferate to the point where the binary itself is revealed as contingent. The free play of attributes or “physical features” is never an absolute destruction, for the ontological field distorted by gender is one of continuous plenitude. Wittig criticizes “the straight mind” for being unable to liberate itself from the thought of “difference.” In temporary alliance with Deleuze and Guattari, Wittig opposes psychoanalysis as a science predicated on an economy of “lack” and “negation.” In “Paradigm,” an early essay, Wittig considers that the overthrow of the system of binary sex might initiate a cultural field of *many* sexes. In that essay she refers to *Anti-Oedipus*: “For us there are, not one or two sexes, but many (cf. Guattari/Deleuze), as many sexes as there are individuals.”³⁹ The limitless proliferation of sexes, however, logically entails the negation of sex as such. If the number of sexes corresponds to the number of existing individuals, sex would no longer have any gen-

eral application as a term: one’s sex would be a radically singular property and would no longer be able to operate as a useful or descriptive generalization.

The metaphors of destruction, overthrow, and violence that work in Wittig’s theory and fiction have a difficult ontological status. Although linguistic categories shape reality in a “violent” way, creating social fictions in the name of the real, there appears to be a truer reality, an ontological field of unity against which these social fictions are measured. Wittig refuses the distinction between an “abstract” concept and a “material” reality, arguing that concepts are formed and circulated within the materiality of language and that that language works in a *material* way to construct the social world.⁴⁰ On the other hand, these “constructions” are understood as distortions and reifications to be judged against a prior ontological field of radical unity and plenitude. Constructs are thus “real” to the extent that they are fictive phenomena that gain power within discourse. These constructs are disempowered, however, through locutionary acts that implicitly seek recourse to the universality of language and the unity of Being. Wittig argues that “it is quite possible for a work of literature to operate as a war machine,” even “a perfect war machine.”⁴¹ The main strategy of this war is for women, lesbians, and gay men—all of whom have been particularized through an identification with “sex”—to preempt the position of the speaking subject and its invocation of the universal point of view.

The question of how a particular and relative subject can speak his or her way out of the category of sex directs Wittig’s various considerations of Djuna Barnes,⁴² Marcel Proust,⁴³ and Natalie Sarraute.⁴⁴ The literary text as war machine is, in each instance, directed against the hierarchical division of gender, the splitting of universal and particular in the name of a recovery of a prior and essential unity of those terms. To universalize the point of view of women is simultaneously to destroy the category of women and to establish the possibility of a new humanism. Destruction is thus always restoration—that is, the destruction of a set of categories that introduce artificial divisions into an otherwise unified ontology.

Literary works, however, maintain a privileged access to this primary field of ontological abundance. The split between form and content corresponds to the artificial philosophical distinction between abstract, universal thought and concrete, material reality. Just as Wittig invokes Bakhtin to establish concepts as material realities, so she invokes literary language more generally to reestablish the unity of language as indissoluble form and content: “through literature . . . words come back to us whole again”⁴⁵; “language exists as a paradise

made of visible, audible, palpable, palatable words.”⁴⁶ Above all, literary works offer Wittig the occasion to experiment with pronouns that within systems of compulsory meaning conflate the masculine with the universal and invariably particularize the feminine. In *Les Guérillères*,⁴⁷ she seeks to eliminate any he-they (*il-ils*) conjunctions, indeed, any “he” (*il*), and to offer *elles* as standing for the general, the universal. “The goal of this approach,” she writes, “is not to feminize the world but to make the categories of sex obsolete in language.”⁴⁸

In a self-consciously defiant imperialist strategy, Wittig argues that only by taking up the universal and absolute point of view, effectively lesbianizing the entire world, can the compulsory order of heterosexuality be destroyed. The *j/le* of *The Lesbian Body* is supposed to establish the lesbian, not as a split subject, but as the sovereign subject who can wage war linguistically against a “world” that has constituted a semantic and syntactic assault against the lesbian. Her point is not to call attention to the presence of rights of “women” or “lesbians” as individuals, but to counter the globalizing heterosexist episteme by a reverse discourse of equal reach and power. The point is not to assume the position of the speaking subject in order to be a recognized individual within a set of reciprocal linguistic relations; rather, the speaking subject becomes more than the individual, becomes an absolute perspective that imposes its categories on the entire linguistic field, known as “the world.” Only a war strategy that rivals the proportions of compulsory heterosexuality, Wittig argues, will operate effectively to challenge the latter’s epistemic hegemony.

In its ideal sense, speaking is, for Wittig, a potent act, an assertion of sovereignty that simultaneously implies a relationship of equality with other speaking subjects.⁴⁹ This ideal or primary “contract” of language operates at an implicit level. Language has a dual possibility: It can be used to assert a true and inclusive universality of persons, or it can institute a hierarchy in which only some persons are eligible to speak and others, by virtue of their exclusion from the universal point of view, cannot “speak” without simultaneously deauthorizing that speech. Prior to this asymmetrical relation to speech, however, is an ideal social contract, one in which every first-person speech act presupposes and affirms an absolute reciprocity among speaking subjects—Wittig’s version of the ideal speech situation. Distorting and concealing that ideal reciprocity, however, is the *heterosexual contract*, the focus of Wittig’s most recent theoretical work,⁵⁰ although present in her theoretical essays all along.⁵¹

Unspoken but always operative, the heterosexual contract cannot be reduced to any of its empirical appearances. Wittig writes:

I confront a nonexistent object, a fetish, an ideological form which cannot be grasped in reality, except through its effects, whose existence lies in the mind of people, but in a way that affects their whole life, the way they act, the way they move, the way they think. So we are dealing with an object both imaginary and real.⁵²

As in Lacan, the idealization of heterosexuality appears even within Wittig’s own formulation to exercise a control over the bodies of practicing heterosexuals that is finally impossible, indeed, that is bound to falter on its own impossibility. Wittig appears to believe that only the radical departure from heterosexual contexts—namely becoming lesbian or gay—can bring about the downfall of this heterosexual regime. But this political consequence follows only if one understands all “participation” in heterosexuality to be a repetition and consolidation of heterosexual oppression. The possibilities of resignifying heterosexuality itself are refused precisely because heterosexuality is understood as a total system that requires a thoroughgoing displacement. The political options that follow from such a totalizing view of heterosexist power are (a) radical conformity or (b) radical revolution.

Assuming the systemic integrity of heterosexuality is extremely problematic both for Wittig’s understanding of heterosexual practice and for her conception of homosexuality and lesbianism. As radically “outside” the heterosexual matrix, homosexuality is conceived as radically unconditioned by heterosexual norms. This purification of homosexuality, a kind of lesbian modernism, is currently contested by numerous lesbian and gay discourses that understand lesbian and gay culture as embedded in the larger structures of heterosexuality even as they are positioned in subversive or resignificatory relationships to heterosexual cultural configurations. Wittig’s view refuses the possibility, it seems, of a volitional or optional heterosexuality; yet, even if heterosexuality is presented as obligatory or presumptive, it does not follow that all heterosexual acts are radically determined. Further, Wittig’s radical disjunction between straight and gay replicates the kind of disjunctive binarism that she herself characterizes as the divisive philosophical gesture of the straight mind.

My own conviction is that the radical disjunction posited by Wittig between heterosexuality and homosexuality is simply not true, that there are structures of psychic homosexuality within heterosexual relations, and structures of psychic heterosexuality within gay and lesbian sexuality and relationships. Further, there are other power/discourse centers that construct and structure both gay and straight sexuality; heterosexuality is not the only compulsory display of power

that informs sexuality. The ideal of a coherent heterosexuality that Wittig describes as the norm and standard of the heterosexual contract is an impossible ideal, a “fetish,” as she herself points out. A psychoanalytic elaboration might contend that this impossibility is exposed in virtue of the complexity and resistance of an unconscious sexuality that is not always already heterosexual. In this sense, heterosexuality offers normative sexual positions that are intrinsically impossible to embody, and the persistent failure to identify fully and without incoherence with these positions reveals heterosexuality itself not only as a compulsory law, but as an inevitable comedy. Indeed, I would offer this insight into heterosexuality as both a compulsory system and an intrinsic comedy, a constant parody of itself, as an alternative gay/lesbian perspective.

Clearly, the norm of compulsory heterosexuality does operate with the force and violence that Wittig describes, but my own position is that this is not the *only* way that it operates. For Wittig, the strategies for political resistance to normative heterosexuality are fairly direct. Only the array of embodied persons who are not engaged in a heterosexual relationship within the confines of the family which takes reproduction to be the end or telos of sexuality are, in effect, actively contesting the categories of sex or, at least, not in compliance with the normative presuppositions and purposes of that set of categories. To be lesbian or gay is, for Wittig, no longer to know one’s sex, to be engaged in a confusion and proliferation of categories that make sex an impossible category of identity. As emancipatory as this sounds, Wittig’s proposal overrides those discourses within gay and lesbian culture that proliferate specifically gay sexual identities by appropriating and redeploying the categories of sex. The terms *queens*, *butches*, *femmes*, *girls*, even the parodic reappropriation of *dyke*, *queer*, and *fag* redeploy and destabilize the categories of sex and the originally derogatory categories for homosexual identity. All of these terms might be understood as symptomatic of “the straight mind,” modes of identifying with the oppressor’s version of the identity of the oppressed. On the other hand, *lesbian* has surely been partially reclaimed from its historical meanings, and parodic categories serve the purposes of denaturalizing sex itself. When the neighborhood gay restaurant closes for vacation, the owners put out a sign, explaining that “she’s overworked and needs a rest.” This very gay appropriation of the feminine works to multiply possible sites of application of the term, to reveal the arbitrary relation between the signifier and the signified, and to destabilize and mobilize the sign. Is this a colonizing “appropriation” of the feminine? My sense is no.

That accusation assumes that the feminine belongs to women, an assumption surely suspect.

Within lesbian contexts, the “identification” with masculinity that appears as butch identity is not a simple assimilation of lesbianism back into the terms of heterosexuality. As one lesbian femme explained, she likes her boys to be girls, meaning that “being a girl” contextualizes and resignifies “masculinity” in a butch identity. As a result, that masculinity, if that it can be called, is always brought into relief against a culturally intelligible “female body.” It is precisely this dissonant juxtaposition and the sexual tension that its transgression generates that constitute the object of desire. In other words, the object [and clearly, there is not just one] of lesbian-femme desire is neither some decontextualized female body nor a discrete yet superimposed masculine identity, but the destabilization of both terms as they come into erotic interplay. Similarly, some heterosexual or bisexual women may well prefer that the relation of “figure” to “ground” work in the opposite direction—that is, they may prefer that their girls be boys. In that case, the perception of “feminine” identity would be juxtaposed on the “male body” as ground, but both terms would, through the juxtaposition, lose their internal stability and distinctness from each other. Clearly, this way of thinking about gendered exchanges of desire admits of much greater complexity, for the play of masculine and feminine, as well as the inversion of ground to figure can constitute a highly complex and structured production of desire. Significantly, both the sexed body as “ground” and the butch or femme identity as “figure” can shift, invert, and create erotic havoc of various sorts. Neither can lay claim to “the real,” although either can qualify as an object of belief, depending on the dynamic of the sexual exchange. The idea that butch and femme are in some sense “replicas” or “copies” of heterosexual exchange underestimates the erotic significance of these identities as internally dissonant and complex in their resignification of the hegemonic categories by which they are enabled. Lesbian femmes may recall the heterosexual scene, as it were, but also displace it at the same time. In both butch and femme identities, the very notion of an original or natural identity is put into question; indeed, it is precisely that question as it is embodied in these identities that becomes one source of their erotic significance.

Although Wittig does not discuss the meaning of butch/femme identities, her notion of fictive sex suggests a similar dissimulation of a natural or original notion of gendered coherence assumed to exist among sexed bodies, gender identities, and sexualities. Implicit in Wittig’s description of sex as a fictive category is the notion that

the various components of "sex" may well disaggregate. In such a breakdown of bodily coherence, the category of sex could no longer operate descriptively in any given cultural domain. If the category of "sex" is established through repeated *acts*, then conversely, the social action of bodies within the cultural field can withdraw the very power of reality that they themselves invested in the category.

For power to be withdrawn, power itself would have to be understood as the retractable operation of volition; indeed, the heterosexual contract would be understood to be sustained through a series of choices, just as the social contract in Locke or Rousseau is understood to presuppose the rational choice or deliberate will of those it is said to govern. If power is not reduced to volition, however, and the classical liberal and existential model of freedom is refused, then power-relations can be understood, as I think they ought to be, as constraining and constituting the very possibilities of volition. Hence, power can be neither withdrawn nor refused, but only redeployed. Indeed, in my view, the normative focus for gay and lesbian practice ought to be on the subversive and parodic redeployment of power rather than on the impossible fantasy of its full-scale transcendence.

Whereas Wittig clearly envisions lesbianism to be a full-scale refusal of heterosexuality, I would argue that even that refusal constitutes an engagement and, ultimately, a radical dependence on the very terms that lesbianism purports to transcend. If sexuality and power are coextensive, and if lesbian sexuality is no more and no less constructed than other modes of sexuality, then there is no promise of limitless pleasure after the shackles of the category of sex have been thrown off. The structuring presence of heterosexual constructs within gay and lesbian sexuality does not mean that those constructs *determine* gay and lesbian sexuality nor that gay and lesbian sexuality are derivable or reducible to those constructs. Indeed, consider the disempowering and denaturalizing effects of a specifically gay deployment of heterosexual constructs. The presence of these norms not only constitute a site of power that cannot be refused, but they can and do become the site of parodic contest and display that robs compulsory heterosexuality of its claims to naturalness and originality. Wittig calls for a position beyond sex that returns her theory to a problematic humanism based in a problematic metaphysics of presence. And yet, her literary works appear to enact a different kind of political strategy than the one for which she explicitly calls in her theoretical essays. In *The Lesbian Body* and in *Les Guérillères*, the narrative strategy through which political transformation is articulated makes use of redeployment and transvaluation time and again both to make use of originally oppressive terms and to deprive them of their legitimating functions.

Although Wittig herself is a "materialist," the term has a specific meaning within her theoretical framework. She wants to overcome the split between materiality and representation that characterizes "straight" thinking. Materialism implies neither a reduction of ideas to matter nor the view of theory as a reflection of its economic base, strictly conceived. Wittig's materialism takes social institutions and practices, in particular, the institution of heterosexuality, as the basis of critical analysis. In "The Straight Mind" and "The Social Contract,"⁵³ she understands the institution of heterosexuality as the founding basis of the male-dominated social orders. "Nature" and the domain of materiality are ideas, ideological constructs, produced by these social institutions to support the political interests of the heterosexual contract. In this sense, Wittig is a classic idealist for whom nature is understood as a mental representation. A language of compulsory meanings produces this representation of nature to further the political strategy of sexual domination and to rationalize the institution of compulsory heterosexuality.

Unlike Beauvoir, Wittig sees nature not as a resistant materiality, a medium, surface, or an object; it is an "idea" generated and sustained for the purposes of social control. The very elasticity of the ostensible materiality of the body is shown in *The Lesbian Body* as language figures and refigures the parts of the body into radically new social configurations of form (and antiform). Like those mundane and scientific languages that circulate the idea of "nature" and so produce the naturalized conception of discretely sexed bodies, Wittig's own language enacts an alternative disfiguring and refiguring of bodies. Her aim is to expose the idea of a natural body as a construction and to offer a deconstructive/reconstructive set of strategies for configuring bodies to contest the power of heterosexuality. The very shape and form of bodies, their unifying principle, their composite parts, are always figured by a language imbued with political interests. For Wittig, the political challenge is to seize *language* as the means of representation *and* production, to treat it as an instrument that invariably constructs the field of bodies and that ought to be used to deconstruct and reconstruct bodies outside the oppressive categories of sex.

If the multiplication of gender possibilities expose and disrupt the binary reifications of gender, what is the nature of such a subversive enactment? How can such an enactment constitute a subversion? In *The Lesbian Body*, the act of love-making literally tears the bodies of its partners apart. As *lesbian* sexuality, this set of acts outside of the reproductive matrix produces the body itself as an incoherent center of attributes, gestures, and desires. And in Wittig's *Les Guérillères*,

the same kind of disintegrating effect, even violence, emerges in the struggle between the “women” and their oppressors. In that context, Wittig clearly distances herself from those who would defend the notion of a “specifically feminine” pleasure, writing, or identity; she all but mocks those who would hold up the “circle” as their emblem. For Wittig, the task is not to prefer the feminine side of the binary to the masculine, but to displace the binary as such through a specifically lesbian disintegration of its constitutive categories.

The disintegration appears literal in the fictional text, as does the violent struggle in *Les Guérillères*. Wittig’s texts have been criticized for this use of violence and force— notions that on the surface seem antithetical to feminist aims. But note that Wittig’s narrative strategy is not to identify the feminine through a strategy of differentiation or exclusion from the masculine. Such a strategy consolidates hierarchy and binarisms through a transvaluation of values by which women now represent the domain of positive value. In contrast to a strategy that consolidates women’s identity through an exclusionary process of differentiation, Wittig offers a strategy of reappropriation and subversive redeployment of precisely those “values” that originally appeared to belong to the masculine domain. One might well object that Wittig has assimilated masculine values or, indeed, that she is “male-identified,” but the very notion of “identification” reemerges in the context of this literary production as immeasurably more complex than the uncritical use of that term suggests. The violence and struggle in her text is, significantly, recontextualized, no longer sustaining the same meanings that it has in oppressive contexts. It is neither a simple “turning of the tables” in which women now wage violence against men, nor a simple *internalization* of masculine norms such that women now wage violence against themselves. The violence of the text has the identity and coherence of the category of sex as its target, a lifeless construct, a construct out to deaden the body. Because that category is the naturalized construct that makes the institution of normative heterosexuality seem inevitable, Wittig’s textual violence is enacted against that institution, and not primarily for its heterosexuality, but for its compulsoriness.

Note as well that the category of sex and the naturalized institution of heterosexuality are *constructs*, socially instituted and socially regulated fantasies or “fetishes,” not *natural* categories, but *political* ones (categories that prove that recourse to the “natural” in such contexts is always political). Hence, the body which is torn apart, the wars waged among women, are *textual* violences, the deconstruction of constructs that are always already a kind of violence against the body’s possibilities.

But here we might ask: What is left when the body rendered coherent through the category of sex is *disaggregated*, rendered chaotic? Can this body be re-membered, be put back together again? Are there possibilities of agency that do not require the coherent reassembling of this construct? Wittig’s text not only deconstructs sex and offers a way to disintegrate the false unity designated by sex, but enacts as well a kind of diffuse corporeal agency generated from a number of different centers of power. Indeed, the source of personal and political agency comes not from within the individual, but in and through the complex cultural exchanges among bodies in which identity itself is ever-shifting, indeed, where identity itself is constructed, disintegrated, and recirculated only within the context of a dynamic field of cultural relations. To *be* a woman is, then, for Wittig as well as for Beauvoir, to *become* a woman, but because this process is in no sense fixed, it is possible to become a being whom neither *man* nor *woman* truly describes. This is not the figure of the androgyne nor some hypothetical “third gender,” nor is it a *transcendence* of the binary. Instead, it is an internal subversion in which the binary is both presupposed and proliferated to the point where it no longer makes sense. The force of Wittig’s fiction, its linguistic challenge, is to offer an experience beyond the categories of identity, an erotic struggle to create new categories from the ruins of the old, new ways of being a body within the cultural field, and whole new languages of description.

In response to Beauvoir’s notion “one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one,” Wittig claims that instead of becoming a woman, one (anyone?) can become a lesbian. By refusing the category of women, Wittig’s lesbian-feminism appears to cut off any kind of solidarity with heterosexual women and implicitly to assume that lesbianism is the logically or politically necessary consequence of feminism. This kind of separatist prescriptivism is surely no longer viable. But even if it were politically desirable, what criteria would be used to decide the question of sexual “identity”?

If to become a lesbian is an *act*, a leave-taking of heterosexuality, a self-naming that contests the compulsory meanings of heterosexuality’s *women* and *men*, what is to keep the name of lesbian from becoming an equally compulsory category? What qualifies as a lesbian? Does anyone know? If a lesbian refutes the radical disjunction between heterosexual and homosexual economies that Wittig promotes, is that lesbian no longer a lesbian? And if it is an “act” that founds the identity as a performative accomplishment of sexuality, are there certain kinds of acts that qualify over others as foundational? Can one do the act with a “straight mind”? Can one understand

lesbian sexuality not only as a contestation of the category of "sex," of "women," of "natural bodies," but also of "lesbian"?

Interestingly, Wittig suggests a necessary relationship between the homosexual point of view and that of figurative language, as if to be a homosexual is to contest the compulsory syntax and semantics that construct "the real." Excluded from the real, the homosexual point of view, if there is one, might well understand the real as constituted through a set of exclusions, margins that do not appear, absences that do not figure. What a tragic mistake, then, to construct a gay/lesbian identity through the same exclusionary means, as if the excluded were not, precisely through its exclusion, always presupposed and, indeed, *required* for the construction of that identity. Such an exclusion, paradoxically, institutes precisely the relation of radical dependency it seeks to overcome: Lesbianism would then *require* heterosexuality. Lesbianism that defines itself in radical exclusion from heterosexuality deprives itself of the capacity to resignify the very heterosexual constructs by which it is partially and inevitably constituted. As a result, that lesbian strategy would consolidate compulsory heterosexuality in its oppressive forms.

The more insidious and effective strategy it seems is a thoroughgoing appropriation and redeployment of the categories of identity themselves, not merely to contest "sex," but to articulate the convergence of multiple sexual discourses at the site of "identity" in order to render that category, in whatever form, permanently problematic.

iv. Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions

"Garbo 'got in drag' whenever she took some heavy glamour part, whenever she melted in or out of a man's arms, whenever she simply let that heavenly-flexed neck . . . bear the weight of her thrown-back head. . . . How resplendent seems the art of acting! It is all *impersonation*, whether the sex underneath is true or not."—

Parker Tyler, "The Garbo Image," quoted in Esther Newton, *Mother Camp*

Categories of true sex, discrete gender, and specific sexuality have constituted the stable point of reference for a great deal of feminist theory and politics. These constructs of identity serve as the points of epistemic departure from which theory emerges and politics itself is shaped. In the case of feminism, politics is ostensibly shaped to express the interests, the perspectives, of "women." But is there a political shape to "women," as it were, that precedes and prefigures the political elaboration of their interests and epistemic point of view? How is

that identity shaped, and is it a political shaping that takes the very morphology and boundary of the sexed body as the ground, surface, or site of cultural inscription? What circumscribes that site as "the female body"? Is "the body" or "the sexed body" the firm foundation on which gender and systems of compulsory sexuality operate? Or is "the body" itself shaped by political forces with strategic interests in keeping that body bounded and constituted by the markers of sex?

The sex/gender distinction and the category of sex itself appear to presuppose a generalization of "the body" that preexists the acquisition of its sexed significance. This "body" often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as "external" to that body. Any theory of the culturally constructed body, however, ought to question "the body" as a construct of suspect generality when it is figured as passive and prior to discourse. There are Christian and Cartesian precedents to such views which, prior to the emergence of vitalistic biologies in the nineteenth century, understand "the body" as so much inert matter, signifying nothing or, more specifically, signifying a profane void, the fallen state: deception, sin, the premonitional metaphors of hell and the eternal feminine. There are many occasions in both Sartre's and Beauvoir's work where "the body" is figured as a mute facticity, anticipating some meaning that can be attributed only by a transcendent consciousness, understood in Cartesian terms as radically immaterial. But what establishes this dualism for us? What separates off "the body" as indifferent to signification, and signification itself as the act of a radically disembodied consciousness or, rather, the act that radically disembodies that consciousness? To what extent is that Cartesian dualism presupposed in phenomenology adapted to the structuralist frame in which mind/body is redescribed as culture/nature? With respect to gender discourse, to what extent do these problematic dualisms still operate within the very descriptions that are supposed to lead us out of that binarism and its implicit hierarchy? How are the contours of the body clearly marked as the taken-for-granted ground or surface upon which gender significations are inscribed, a mere facticity devoid of value, prior to significance?

Wittig suggests that a culturally specific epistemic *a priori* establishes the naturalness of "sex." But by what enigmatic means has "the body" been accepted as a *prima facie* given that admits of no genealogy? Even within Foucault's essay on the very theme of genealogy, the body is figured as a surface and the scene of a cultural inscription: "the body is the inscribed surface of events."⁵⁴ The task of genealogy, he claims, is "to expose a body totally imprinted by history." His sentence continues, however, by referring to the goal of

“history”—here clearly understood on the model of Freud’s “civilization”—as the “destruction of the body” (148). Forces and impulses with multiple directionalities are precisely that which history both destroys and preserves through the *entstehung* (historical event) of inscription. As “a volume in perpetual disintegration” (148), the body is always under siege, suffering destruction by the very terms of history. And history is the creation of values and meanings by a signifying practice that requires the subjection of the body. This corporeal destruction is necessary to produce the speaking subject and its significations. This is a body, described through the language of surface and force, weakened through a “single drama” of domination, inscription, and creation (150). This is not the *modus vivendi* of one kind of history rather than another, but is, for Foucault, “history” (148) in its essential and repressive gesture.

Although Foucault writes, “Nothing in man [*sic*—not even his body—is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men [*sic*]” (153), he nevertheless points to the constancy of cultural inscription as a “single drama” that acts on the body. If the creation of values, that historical mode of signification, requires the destruction of the body, much as the instrument of torture in Kafka’s *In the Penal Colony* destroys the body on which it writes, then there must be a body prior to that inscription, stable and self-identical, subject to that sacrificial destruction. In a sense, for Foucault, as for Nietzsche, cultural values emerge as the result of an inscription on the body, understood as a medium, indeed, a blank page; in order for this inscription to signify, however, that medium must itself be destroyed—that is, fully transvaluated into a sublimated domain of values. Within the metaphors of this notion of cultural values is the figure of history as a relentless writing instrument, and the body as the medium which must be destroyed and transfigured in order for “culture” to emerge.

By maintaining a body prior to its cultural inscription, Foucault appears to assume a materiality prior to signification and form. Because this distinction operates as essential to the task of genealogy as he defines it, the distinction itself is precluded as an object of genealogical investigation. Occasionally in his analysis of Herculine, Foucault subscribes to a prediscursive multiplicity of bodily forces that break through the surface of the body to disrupt the regulating practices of cultural coherence imposed upon that body by a power regime, understood as a vicissitude of “history.” If the presumption of some kind of precategorical source of disruption is refused, is it still possible to give a genealogical account of the demarcation of the body as such as a signifying practice? This demarcation is not

initiated by a reified history or by a subject. This marking is the result of a diffuse and active structuring of the social field. This signifying practice effects a social space for and of the body within certain regulatory grids of intelligibility.

Mary Douglas’ *Purity and Danger* suggests that the very contours of “the body” are established through markings that seek to establish specific codes of cultural coherence. Any discourse that establishes the boundaries of the body serves the purpose of instating and naturalizing certain taboos regarding the appropriate limits, postures, and modes of exchange that define what it is that constitutes bodies:

ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created.⁵⁵

Although Douglas clearly subscribes to a structuralist distinction between an inherently unruly nature and an order imposed by cultural means, the “untidiness” to which she refers can be redescribed as a region of *cultural* unruliness and disorder. Assuming the inevitably binary structure of the nature/culture distinction, Douglas cannot point toward an alternative configuration of culture in which such distinctions become malleable or proliferate beyond the binary frame. Her analysis, however, provides a possible point of departure for understanding the relationship by which social taboos institute and maintain the boundaries of the body as such. Her analysis suggests that what constitutes the limit of the body is never merely material, but that the surface, the skin, is systemically signified by taboos and anticipated transgressions; indeed, the boundaries of the body become, within her analysis, the limits of the social *per se*. A post-structuralist appropriation of her view might well understand the boundaries of the body as the limits of the socially *hegemonic*. In a variety of cultures, she maintains, there are

pollution powers which inhere in the structure of ideas itself and which punish a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or joining of that which should be separate. It follows from this that pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined.

A polluting person is always in the wrong. He [*sic*] has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed over some line which

should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone.⁵⁶

In a sense, Simon Watney has identified the contemporary construction of "the polluting person" as the person with AIDS in his *Policing Desire: AIDS, Pornography, and the Media*.⁵⁷ Not only is the illness figured as the "gay disease," but throughout the media's hysterical and homophobic response to the illness there is a tactical construction of a continuity between the polluted status of the homosexual by virtue of the boundary-trespass that is homosexuality and the disease as a specific modality of homosexual pollution. That the disease is transmitted through the exchange of bodily fluids suggests within the sensationalist graphics of homophobic signifying systems the dangers that permeable bodily boundaries present to the social order as such. Douglas remarks that "the body is a model that can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious."⁵⁸ And she asks a question which one might have expected to read in Foucault: "Why should bodily margins be thought to be specifically invested with power and danger?"⁵⁹

Douglas suggests that all social systems are vulnerable at their margins, and that all margins are accordingly considered dangerous. If the body is synecdochal for the social system *per se* or a site in which open systems converge, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment. Since anal and oral sex among men clearly establishes certain kinds of bodily permeabilities unsanctioned by the hegemonic order, male homosexuality would, within such a hegemonic point of view, constitute a site of danger and pollution, prior to and regardless of the cultural presence of AIDS. Similarly, the "polluted" status of lesbians, regardless of their low-risk status with respect to AIDS, brings into relief the dangers of their bodily exchanges. Significantly, being "outside" the hegemonic order does not signify being "in" a state of filthy and untidy nature. Paradoxically, homosexuality is almost always conceived within the homophobic signifying economy as *both* uncivilized and unnatural.

The construction of stable bodily contours relies upon fixed sites of corporeal permeability and impermeability. Those sexual practices in both homosexual and heterosexual contexts that open surfaces and orifices to erotic signification or close down others effectively reinscribe the boundaries of the body along new cultural lines. Anal sex among men is an example, as is the radical re-membering of the body in Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*. Douglas alludes to "a kind of sex pollution which expresses a desire to keep the body (physical and social) intact,"⁶⁰ suggesting that the naturalized notion of "the" body

is itself a consequence of taboos that render that body discrete by virtue of its stable boundaries. Further, the rites of passage that govern various bodily orifices presuppose a heterosexual construction of gendered exchange, positions, and erotic possibilities. The deregulation of such exchanges accordingly disrupts the very boundaries that determine what it is to be a body at all. Indeed, the critical inquiry that traces the regulatory practices within which bodily contours are constructed constitutes precisely the genealogy of "the body" in its discreteness that might further radicalize Foucault's theory.⁶¹

Significantly, Kristeva's discussion of abjection in *The Powers of Horror* begins to suggest the uses of this structuralist notion of a boundary-constituting taboo for the purposes of constructing a discrete subject through exclusion.⁶² The "abject" designates that which has been expelled from the body, discharged as excrement, literally rendered "Other." This appears as an expulsion of alien elements, but the alien is effectively established through this expulsion. The construction of the "not-me" as the abject establishes the boundaries of the body which are also the first contours of the subject. Kristeva writes:

nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. "I" want none of that element, sign of their desire; "I" do not want to listen, "I" do not assimilate it, "I" expel it. But since the food is not an "other" for "me," who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish myself.⁶³

The boundary of the body as well as the distinction between internal and external is established through the ejection and transvaluation of something originally part of identity into a defiling otherness. As Iris Young has suggested in her use of Kristeva to understand sexism, homophobia, and racism, the repudiation of bodies for their sex, sexuality, and/or color is an "expulsion" followed by a "repulsion" that founds and consolidates culturally hegemonic identities along sex/race/sexuality axes of differentiation.⁶⁴ Young's appropriation of Kristeva shows how the operation of repulsion can consolidate "identities" founded on the instituting of the "Other" or a set of Others through exclusion and domination. What constitutes through division the "inner" and "outer" worlds of the subject is a border and boundary tenuously maintained for the purposes of social regulation and control. The boundary between the inner and outer is confounded by those excremental passages in which the inner effectively

becomes outer, and this excreting function becomes, as it were, the model by which other forms of identity-differentiation are accomplished. In effect, this is the mode by which Others become shit. For inner and outer worlds to remain utterly distinct, the entire surface of the body would have to achieve an impossible impermeability. This sealing of its surfaces would constitute the seamless boundary of the subject; but this enclosure would invariably be exploded by precisely that excremental filth that it fears.

Regardless of the compelling metaphors of the spatial distinctions of inner and outer, they remain linguistic terms that facilitate and articulate a set of fantasies, feared and desired. "Inner" and "outer" make sense only with reference to a mediating boundary that strives for stability. And this stability, this coherence, is determined in large part by cultural orders that sanction the subject and compel its differentiation from the object. Hence, "inner" and "outer" constitute a binary distinction that stabilizes and consolidates the coherent subject. When that subject is challenged, the meaning and necessity of the terms are subject to displacement. If the "inner world" no longer designates a topos, then the internal fixity of the self and, indeed, the internal locale of gender identity, become similarly suspect. The critical question is not *how* did that identity become *internalized*? as if internalization were a process or a mechanism that might be descriptively reconstructed. Rather, the question is: From what strategic position in public discourse and for what reasons has the trope of interiority and the disjunctive binary of inner/outer taken hold? In what language is "inner space" figured? What kind of figuration is it, and through what figure of the body is it signified? How does a body figure on its surface the very invisibility of its hidden depth?

From Interiority to Gender Performatives

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault challenges the language of internalization as it operates in the service of the disciplinary regime of the subjection and subjectivation of criminals.⁶⁵ Although Foucault objected to what he understood to be the psychoanalytic belief in the "inner" truth of sex in *The History of Sexuality*, he turns to a criticism of the doctrine of internalization for separate purposes in the context of his history of criminology. In a sense, *Discipline and Punish* can be read as Foucault's effort to rewrite Nietzsche's doctrine of internalization in *On the Genealogy of Morals* on the model of *inscription*. In the context of prisoners, Foucault writes, the strategy has been not to enforce a repression of their desires, but to compel their bodies to signify the prohibitive law as their very essence, style, and necessity. That law is not literally

internalized, but incorporated, with the consequence that bodies are produced which signify that law on and through the body; there the law is manifest as the essence of their selves, the meaning of their soul, their conscience, the law of their desire. In effect, the law is at once fully manifest and fully latent, for it never appears as external to the bodies it subjects and subjectivates. Foucault writes:

It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently *around, on, within*, the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those that are punished (my emphasis).⁶⁶

The figure of the interior soul understood as "within" the body is signified through its inscription *on* the body, even though its primary mode of signification is through its very absence, its potent invisibility. The effect of a structuring inner space is produced through the signification of a body as a vital and sacred enclosure. The soul is precisely what the body lacks; hence, the body presents itself as a signifying lack. That lack which *is* the body signifies the soul as that which cannot show. In this sense, then, the soul is a surface signification that contests and displaces the inner/outer distinction itself, a figure of interior psychic space inscribed *on* the body as a social signification that perpetually renounces itself as such. In Foucault's terms, the soul is not imprisoned by or within the body, as some Christian imagery would suggest, but "the soul is the prison of the body."⁶⁷

The redescription of intrapsychic processes in terms of the surface politics of the body implies a corollary redescription of gender as the disciplinary production of the figures of fantasy through the play of presence and absence on the body's surface, the construction of the gendered body through a series of exclusions and denials, signifying absences. But what determines the manifest and latent text of the body politic? What is the prohibitive law that generates the corporeal stylization of gender, the fantasied and fantastic figuration of the body? We have already considered the incest taboo and the prior taboo against homosexuality as the generative moments of gender identity, the prohibitions that produce identity along the culturally intelligible grids of an idealized and compulsory heterosexuality. That disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain. The construction of coherence conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does

not seem to follow from gender—indeed, where none of these dimensions of significant corporeality express or reflect one another. When the disorganization and disaggregation of the field of bodies disrupt the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence, it seems that the expressive model loses its descriptive force. That regulatory ideal is then exposed as a norm and a fiction that disguises itself as a developmental law regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe.

According to the understanding of identification as an enacted fantasy or incorporation, however, it is clear that coherence is desired, wished for, idealized, and that this idealization is an effect of a corporeal signification. In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the “integrity” of the subject. In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality. If the “cause” of desire, gesture, and act can be localized within the “self” of the actor, then the political regulations and disciplinary practices which produce that ostensibly coherent gender are effectively displaced from view. The displacement of a political and discursive origin of gender identity onto a psychological “core” precludes an analysis of the political constitution of the gendered subject and its fabricated notions about the ineffable interiority of its sex or of its true identity.

If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity. In *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, anthropologist Esther Newton suggests that the structure of impersonation reveals

one of the key fabricating mechanisms through which the social construction of gender takes place.⁶⁸ I would suggest as well that drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity. Newton writes:

At its most complex, [drag] is a double inversion that says, “appearance is an illusion.” Drag says [Newton’s curious personification] “my ‘outside’ appearance is feminine, but my essence ‘inside’ [the body] is masculine.” At the same time it symbolizes the opposite inversion; “my appearance ‘outside’ [my body, my gender] is masculine but my essence ‘inside’ [myself] is feminine.”⁶⁹

Both claims to truth contradict one another and so displace the entire enactment of gender significations from the discourse of truth and falsity.

The notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities. Within feminist theory, such parodic identities have been understood to be either degrading to women, in the case of drag and cross-dressing, or an uncritical appropriation of sex-role stereotyping from within the practice of heterosexuality, especially in the case of butch/femme lesbian identities. But the relation between the “imitation” and the “original” is, I think, more complicated than that critique generally allows. Moreover, it gives us a clue to the way in which the relationship between primary identification—that is, the original meanings accorded to gender—and subsequent gender experience might be re-framed. The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. As much as drag creates a unified picture of “woman” (what its critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. *In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency.* Indeed, part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of

a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary. In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity.

The notion of gender parody defended here does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is *of* the very notion of an original; just as the psychoanalytic notion of gender identification is constituted by a fantasy of a fantasy, the transfiguration of an Other who is always already a "figure" in that double sense, so gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin. To be more precise, it is a production which, in effect—that is, in its effect—postures as an imitation. This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities. Although the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization. As imitations which effectively displace the meaning of the original, they imitate the myth of originality itself. In the place of an original identification which serves as a determining cause, gender identity might be reconceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody the mechanism of that construction.

According to Fredric Jameson's "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," the imitation that mocks the notion of an original is characteristic of pastiche rather than parody:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its humor.⁷⁰

The loss of the sense of "the normal," however, can be its own occasion for laughter, especially when "the normal," "the original"

is revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no one *can* embody. In this sense, laughter emerges in the realization that all along the original was derived.

Parody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony. A typology of actions would clearly not suffice, for parodic displacement, indeed, parodic laughter, depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered. What performance where will invert the inner/outer distinction and compel a radical rethinking of the psychological presuppositions of gender identity and sexuality? What performance where will compel a reconsideration of the *place* and stability of the masculine and the feminine? And what kind of gender performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire.

If the body is not a "being," but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, then what language is left for understanding this corporeal enactment, gender, that constitutes its "interior" signification on its surface? Sartre would perhaps have called this act "a style of being," Foucault, "a stylistics of existence." And in my earlier reading of Beauvoir, I suggest that gendered bodies are so many "styles of the flesh." These styles all never fully self-styled, for styles have a history, and those histories condition and limit the possibilities. Consider gender, for instance, as a *corporeal style*, an "act," as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where "*performative*" suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning.

Wittig understands gender as the workings of "sex," where "sex" is an obligatory injunction for the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize itself in obedience to a historically delimited possibility, and to do this, not once or twice, but as a sustained and repeated corporeal project. The notion of a "project," however, suggests the originating force of a radical will, and because gender is a project which has cultural survival as its end, the term *strategy* better suggests the situation of duress under which gender performance always and variously occurs. Hence, as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences. Discrete genders are part of what "humanizes" individuals within

contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right. Because there is neither an "essence" that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction "compels" our belief in its necessity and naturalness. The historical possibilities materialized through various corporeal styles are nothing other than those punitively regulated cultural fictions alternately embodied and deflected under duress.

Consider that a sedimentation of gender norms produces the peculiar phenomenon of a "natural sex" or a "real woman" or any number of prevalent and compelling social fictions, and that this is a sedimentation that over time has produced a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes existing in a binary relation to one another. If these styles are enacted, and if they produce the coherent gendered subjects who pose as their originators, what kind of performance might reveal this ostensible "cause" to be an "effect"?

In what senses, then, is gender an act? As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation.⁷¹ Although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this "action" is a public action. There are temporal and collective dimensions to these actions, and their public character is not inconsequential; indeed, the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame—an aim that cannot be attributed to a subject, but, rather, must be understood to found and consolidate the subject.

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a

substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted *social temporality*. Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. Gender is also a norm that can never be fully internalized; "the internal" is a surface signification, and gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody. If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the spatial metaphor of a "ground" will be displaced and revealed as a stylized configuration, indeed, a gendered corporealization of time. The abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional *discontinuity*, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this "ground." The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction.

If gender attributes, however, are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal. The distinction between expression and performativeness is crucial. If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality.

Genders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived. As credible bearers of those attributes, however, genders can also be rendered thoroughly and radically *incredible*.

Conclusion: From Parody to Politics

I began with the speculative question of whether feminist politics could do without a "subject" in the category of women. At stake is not whether it still makes sense, strategically or transitionally, to refer to women in order to make representational claims in their behalf. The feminist "we" is always and only a phantasmatic construction, one that has its purposes, but which denies the internal complexity and indeterminacy of the term and constitutes itself only through the exclusion of some part of the constituency that it simultaneously seeks to represent. The tenuous or phantasmatic status of the "we," however, is not cause for despair or, at least, it is not *only* cause for despair. The radical instability of the category sets into question the *foundational* restrictions on feminist political theorizing and opens up other configurations, not only of genders and bodies, but of politics itself.

The foundationalist reasoning of identity politics tends to assume that an identity must first be in place in order for political interests to be elaborated and, subsequently, political action to be taken. My argument is that there need not be a "doer behind the deed," but that the "doer" is variably constructed in and through the deed. This is not a return to an existential theory of the self as constituted through its acts, for the existential theory maintains a prediscursive structure for both the self and its acts. It is precisely the discursively variable construction of each in and through the other that has interested me here.

The question of locating "agency" is usually associated with the viability of the "subject," where the "subject" is understood to have some stable existence prior to the cultural field that it negotiates. Or, if the subject is culturally constructed, it is nevertheless vested with

an agency, usually figured as the capacity for reflexive mediation, that remains intact regardless of its cultural embeddedness. On such a model, "culture" and "discourse" *mire* the subject, but do not constitute that subject. This move to qualify and enmire the preexisting subject has appeared necessary to establish a point of agency that is not fully *determined* by that culture and discourse. And yet, this kind of reasoning falsely presumes (a) agency can only be established through recourse to a prediscursive "I," even if that "I" is found in the midst of a discursive convergence, and (b) that to be *constituted* by discourse is to be *determined* by discourse, where determination forecloses the possibility of agency.

Even within the theories that maintain a highly qualified or situated subject, the subject still encounters its discursively constituted environment in an oppositional epistemological frame. The culturally enmired subject negotiates its constructions, even when those constructions are the very predicates of its own identity. In Beauvoir, for example, there is an "I" that does its gender, that becomes its gender, but that "I," invariably associated with its gender, is nevertheless a point of agency never fully identifiable with its gender. That *cogito* is never fully *of* the cultural world that it negotiates, no matter the narrowness of the ontological distance that separates that subject from its cultural predicates. The theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and able-bodiedness invariably close with an embarrassed "etc." at the end of the list. Through this horizontal trajectory of adjectives, these positions strive to encompass a situated subject, but invariably fail to be complete. This failure, however, is instructive: what political impetus is to be derived from the exasperated "etc." that so often occurs at the end of such lines? This is a sign of exhaustion as well as of the illimitable process of signification itself. It is the *supplément*, the excess that necessarily accompanies any effort to posit identity once and for all. This illimitable *et cetera*, however, offers itself as a new departure for feminist political theorizing.

If identity is asserted through a process of signification, if identity is always already signified, and yet continues to signify as it circulates within various interlocking discourses, then the question of agency is not to be answered through recourse to an "I" that preexists signification. In other words, the enabling conditions for an assertion of "I" are provided by the structure of signification, the rules that regulate the legitimate and illegitimate invocation of that pronoun, the practices that establish the terms of intelligibility by which that pronoun can circulate. Language is not an *exterior medium or instrument* into which I pour a self and from which I glean a reflection

of that self. The Hegelian model of self-recognition that has been appropriated by Marx, Lukacs, and a variety of contemporary liberatory discourses presupposes a potential adequation between the "I" that confronts its world, including its language, as an object, and the "I" that finds itself as an object in that world. But the subject/object dichotomy, which here belongs to the tradition of Western epistemology, conditions the very problematic of identity that it seeks to solve.

What discursive tradition establishes the "I" and its "Other" in an epistemological confrontation that subsequently decides where and how questions of knowability and agency are to be determined? What kinds of agency are foreclosed through the positing of an epistemological subject precisely because the rules and practices that govern the invocation of that subject and regulate its agency in advance are ruled out as sites of analysis and critical intervention? That the epistemological point of departure is in no sense inevitable is naively and pervasively confirmed by the mundane operations of ordinary language—widely documented within anthropology—that regard the subject/object dichotomy as a strange and contingent, if not violent, philosophical imposition. The language of appropriation, instrumentality, and distanciation germane to the epistemological mode also belong to a strategy of domination that pits the "I" against an "Other" and, once that separation is effected, creates an artificial set of questions about the knowability and recoverability of that Other.

As part of the epistemological inheritance of contemporary political discourses of identity, this binary opposition is a strategic move within a given set of signifying practices, one that establishes the "I" in and through this opposition and which reifies that opposition as a necessity, concealing the discursive apparatus by which the binary itself is constituted. The shift from an *epistemological* account of identity to one which locates the problematic within practices of *signification* permits an analysis that takes the epistemological mode itself as one possible and contingent signifying practice. Further, the question of *agency* is reformulated as a question of how signification and resignification work. In other words, what is signified as an identity is not signified at a given point in time after which it is simply there as an inert piece of entitative language. Clearly, identities *can* appear as so many inert substantives; indeed, epistemological models tend to take this appearance as their point of theoretical departure. However, the substantive "I" only appears as such through a signifying practice that seeks to conceal its own workings and to naturalize its effects. Further, to qualify as a substantive identity is an arduous task, for such appearances are rule-generated identities, ones which rely on the consistent and repeated invocation of rules that condition and re-

strict culturally intelligible practices of identity. Indeed, to understand identity as a *practice*, and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life. Abstractly considered, language refers to an open system of signs by which intelligibility is insistently created and contested. As historically specific organizations of language, discourses present themselves in the plural, coexisting within temporal frames, and instituting unpredictable and inadvertent convergences from which specific modalities of discursive possibilities are engendered.

As a process, signification harbors within itself what the epistemological discourse refers to as "agency." The rules that govern intelligible identity, i.e., that enable and restrict the intelligible assertion of an "I," rules that are partially structured along matrices of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, operate through *repetition*. Indeed, when the subject is said to be constituted, that means simply that the subject is a consequence of certain rule-governed discourses that govern the intelligible invocation of identity. The subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects. In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; "agency," then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, i.e., new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible. The injunction *to be* a given gender produces necessary failures, a variety of incoherent configurations that in their multiplicity exceed and defy the injunction by which they are generated. Further, the very injunction to be a given gender takes place through discursive routes: to be a good mother, to be a heterosexually desirable object, to be a fit worker, in sum, to signify a multiplicity of guarantees in response to a variety of different demands all at once. The coexistence or convergence of such discursive injunctions produces the possibility of a complex reconfiguration and redeployment; it is not a transcendental subject who enables action in the midst of such a convergence. There is no self that is prior to the convergence or who maintains "integrity" prior to its entrance into this conflicted cultural field. There is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very "taking up" is enabled by the tool lying there.

What constitutes a subversive repetition within signifying practices of gender? I have argued (“I” deploy the grammar that governs the genre of the philosophical conclusion, but note that it is the grammar itself that deploys and enables this “I,” even as the “I” that insists itself here repeats, redeploys, and—as the critics will determine—contests the philosophical grammar by which it is both enabled and restricted) that, for instance, within the sex/gender distinction, sex poses as “the real” and the “factic,” the material or corporeal ground upon which gender operates as an act of cultural *inscription*. And yet gender is not written on the body as the torturing instrument of writing in Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony” inscribes itself unintelligibly on the flesh of the accused. The question is not: what meaning does that inscription carry within it, but what cultural apparatus arranges this meeting between instrument and body, what interventions into this ritualistic repetition are possible? The “real” and the “sexually factic” are phantasmatic constructions—illusions of substance—that bodies are compelled to approximate, but never can. What, then, enables the exposure of the rift between the phantasmatic and the real whereby the real admits itself as phantasmatic? Does this offer the possibility for a repetition that is not fully constrained by the injunction to reconsolidate naturalized identities? Just as bodily surfaces are enacted *as* the natural, so these surfaces can become the site of a dissonant and denaturalized performance that reveals the performative status of the natural itself.

Practices of parody can serve to reengage and reconsolidate the very distinction between a privileged and naturalized gender configuration and one that appears as derived, phantasmatic, and mimetic—a failed copy, as it were. And surely parody has been used to further a politics of despair, one which affirms a seemingly inevitable exclusion of marginal genders from the territory of the natural and the real. And yet this failure to become “real” and to embody “the natural” is, I would argue, a constitutive failure of all gender enactments for the very reason that these ontological locales are fundamentally uninhabitable. Hence, there is a subversive laughter in the pastiche-effect of parodic practices in which the original, the authentic, and the real are themselves constituted as effects. The loss of gender norms would have the effect of proliferating gender configurations, destabilizing substantive identity, and depriving the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of their central protagonists: “man” and “woman.” The parodic repetition of gender exposes as well the illusion of gender identity as an intractable depth and inner substance. As the effects of a subtle and politically enforced performativity, gender is an “act,” as it were, that is open to splittings, self-parody,

self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of “the natural” that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status.

I have tried to suggest that the identity categories often presumed to be foundational to feminist politics, that is, deemed necessary in order to mobilize feminism as an identity politics, simultaneously work to limit and constrain in advance the very cultural possibilities that feminism is supposed to open up. The tacit constraints that produce culturally intelligible “sex” ought to be understood as generative political structures rather than naturalized foundations. Paradoxically, the reconceptualization of identity as an *effect*, that is, as *produced* or *generated*, opens up possibilities of “agency” that are insidiously foreclosed by positions that take identity categories as foundational and fixed. For an identity to be an effect means that it is neither fatally determined nor fully artificial and arbitrary. That the *constituted* status of identity is misconstrued along these two conflicting lines suggests the ways in which the feminist discourse on cultural construction remains trapped within the unnecessary binarism of free will and determinism. Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible. The critical task for feminism is not to establish a point of view outside of constructed identities; that conceit is the construction of an epistemological model that would disavow its own cultural location and, hence, promote itself as a global subject, a position that deploys precisely the imperialist strategies that feminism ought to criticize. The critical task is, rather, to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them.

This theoretical inquiry has attempted to locate the political in the very signifying practices that establish, regulate, and deregulate identity. This effort, however, can only be accomplished through the introduction of a set of questions that extend the very notion of the political. How to disrupt the foundations that cover over alternative cultural configurations of gender? How to destabilize and render in their phantasmatic dimension the “premises” of identity politics?

This task has required a critical genealogy of the naturalization of sex and of bodies in general. It has also demanded a reconsideration of the figure of the body as mute, prior to culture, awaiting signification, a figure that cross-checks with the figure of the feminine, awaiting the inscription-as-incision of the masculine signifier for entrance

into language and culture. From a political analysis of compulsory heterosexuality, it has been necessary to question the construction of sex as binary, as a hierarchical binary. From the point of view of gender as enacted, questions have emerged over the fixity of gender identity as an interior depth that is said to be externalized in various forms of "expression." The implicit construction of the primary heterosexual construction of desire is shown to persist even as it appears in the mode of primary bisexuality. Strategies of exclusion and hierarchy are also shown to persist in the formulation of the sex/gender distinction and its recourse to "sex" as the prediscursive as well as the priority of sexuality to culture and, in particular, the cultural construction of sexuality as the prediscursive. Finally, the epistemological paradigm that presumes the priority of the doer to the deed establishes a global and globalizing subject who disavows its own locality as well as the conditions for local intervention.

If taken as the grounds of feminist theory or politics, these "effects" of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality are not only misdescribed as foundations, but the signifying practices that enable this metaleptic misdescription remain outside the purview of a feminist critique of gender relations. To enter into the repetitive practices of this terrain of signification is not a choice, for the "I" that might enter is always already inside: there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have. The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to *displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself. There is no ontology of gender on which we might construct a politics, for gender ontologies always operate within established political contexts as normative injunctions, determining what qualifies as intelligible sex, invoking and consolidating the reproductive constraints on sexuality, setting the prescriptive requirements whereby sexed or gendered bodies come into cultural intelligibility. Ontology is, thus, not a foundation, but a normative injunction that operates insidiously by installing itself into political discourse as its necessary ground.

The deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated. This kind of critique brings into question the foundationalist frame in which feminism as an identity politics has been articulated. The internal paradox of this foundationalism is that it presumes, fixes, and constrains the very "subjects" that it hopes to represent and liberate. The task here is not to celebrate each and every new possibility *qua* possibility, but to redescribe those possibilities

that *already* exist, but which exist within cultural domains designated as culturally unintelligible and impossible. If identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism, and politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects, a new configuration of politics would surely emerge from the ruins of the old. Cultural configurations of sex and gender might then proliferate or, rather, their present proliferation might then become articulable within the discourses that establish intelligible cultural life, confounding the very binarism of sex, and exposing its fundamental unnaturalness. What other local strategies for engaging the "unnatural" might lead to the denaturalization of gender as such?

Notes

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 final 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 show in chapter 3, section ii, "Foucault, Herculine, 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.
2. References throughout this work to a subject before the law are extrapolations of Derrida's reading of Kafka's parable "Before the Law," in *Kafka and the Contemporary Critical Performance: Centenary Readings*, ed. Alan Udoff (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).
3. See Denise Riley, *Am I That Name?: Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (New York: Macmillan, 1988).
4. See Sandra Harding, "The Instability of the Analytical Categories of Feminist Theory," in *Sex and Scientific Inquiry*, eds. Sandra Harding and Jean F. O'Barr (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 283-302.
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 uncritically accepted foundations operate like the "return of the repressed"; based on exclusionary practices, the stable political identities that found political movements may invariably become threatened by the very instability that the foundationalist move creates.
6. I use the term *heterosexual matrix* throughout the 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 discursive/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 (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality.
7. For a discussion of the sex/gender distinction in structuralist anthropology and feminist appropriations and criticisms of that formulation, see chapter 2, section i, "Structuralism's Critical Exchange."
8. For an interesting study of the *berdache* and multiple-gender arrangements in Native American cultures, see Walter L. Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988). See also, Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, eds., *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981). For a politically sensitive and provocative analysis of the *berdache*, transsexuals, and the contingency of gender dichotomies, see Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna, *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).
9. A great deal of feminist research has been conducted within the fields of biology and the history of science that assess the political interests inherent in the various discriminatory procedures that establish the scientific basis for sex. See Ruth Hubbard and Marian Lowe, eds., *Genes and Gender*, vols. 1 and 2, (New York: Gordian Press, 1978, 1979); the two issues on feminism and science of *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, vol. 2, No. 3, Fall 1987, and vol. 3, No. 1, Spring 1988, and especially The Biology and Gender Study Group, "The Importance of Feminist Critique for Contemporary Cell Biology" in this last issue (Spring 1988); Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); Evelyn Fox-Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Donna Haraway, "In the Beginning was the Word: The Genesis of Biological Theory," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1981; Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Sandra Harding and Jean F. O'Barr,

- Sex and Scientific Inquiry*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories About Women and Men* (New York: Norton, 1979).
10. Clearly Foucault's *History of Sexuality* offers one way to rethink the history of "sex" within a given modern Eurocentric context. For a more detailed consideration, see Thomas Lacquer and Catherine Gallagher, eds., *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the 19th Century*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), originally published as an issue of *Representations*, No. 14, Spring 1986.
 11. See my "Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault," in *Feminism as Critique* eds. Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (Basil Blackwell, dist. by University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
 12. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. E. M. Parshley, (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 301.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
 14. See my "Sex and Gender in Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," *Yale French Studies, Simone de Beauvoir: Witness to a Century*, No. 72, Winter, 1986.
 15. Note the extent to which phenomenological theories such as Sartre's, Merleau Ponty's, and Beauvoir's tend to use the term *embodiment*. Drawn as it is from theological contexts, the term tends to figure "the" body as a mode of incarnation and, hence, to preserve the external and dualistic relationship between a signifying immateriality and the materiality of the body itself.
 16. See Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), originally published as *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1977).
 17. See Joan Scott, "Gender as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in *Gender and the Politics of History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 28–52, repr. from *American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 5, 1986.
 18. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. xxvi.
 19. See my "Sex and Gender in Beauvoir's *Second Sex*."
 20. The normative ideal of the body as both a "situation" and an "instrumentality" is embraced by both Beauvoir with respect to gender and Frantz Fanon with respect to race. Fanon concludes his analysis of colonization through recourse to the body as an instrument of freedom, where freedom is, in Cartesian fashion, equated with a consciousness capable of doubt: "O my body, make of me always a man who questions!" (Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* [New York: Grove Press, 1967], p. 323, originally published as *Peau noire, masques blancs* [Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1952]).

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' 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 Sartrian reformulation of that dialectic in the section 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 reification, 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 that remains, however, is 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.
22. See Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Spring, 1982.
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 censors 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).
24. See the argument against "ranking oppressions" in Cherríe Moraga, "La Güera," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings of Radical Women of Color*, eds. Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1982).
25. For a fuller elaboration of the unrepresentability of women in phallogocentric discourse, see Luce Irigaray, "Any Theory of the 'Subject' Has Always Been Appropriated by the Masculine," in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). Irigaray appears to revise this argument in her discussion of "the feminine gender" in *Sexes et parentés*.

26. Monique Wittig, "One is Not Born a Woman," *Feminist Issues*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Winter 1981, p. 53.
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 reformulated by Irigaray as a dominant and hegemonic discourse of phallogocentrism. 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 féminine*. 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 "cognitive 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.
28. Monique Wittig, "The Point of View: Universal or Particular?" *Feminist Issues*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Fall 1983, p. 64.
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 "materialist" 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.
31. Michel Haar, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language," *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, ed. David Allison (New York: Delta, 1977), pp. 17–18.
32. Monique Wittig, "The Mark of Gender," *Feminist Issues*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Fall 1985, p. 4.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
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 is not born, but rather becomes a woman," see my "Beauvoir's Philosophical Contribution," in eds. Ann Garry and Marjorie Pearsall, *Women, Knowledge, and Reality* (Rowman and Allenheld, forthcoming).
35. Michel Foucault, ed., *Herculine Barbin, Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century Hermaphrodite*, trans. Richard McDougall (New York: Colophon, 1980), originally published as *Herculine Barbin, dite Alexina B. présenté par Michel Foucault* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978). The French version lacks the introduction supplied by Foucault with the English translation.
36. See chapter 2, section ii.
37. Foucault, ed., *Herculine Barbin*, p. x.
38. Robert Stoller, *Presentations of Gender*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 11–14.
39. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1969), p. 45.
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 Guillaumin 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," *Pluriel*, Vol. 11, 1977. The "Myth of Woman" is a chapter of Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.
41. Monique Wittig, "Paradigm," in *Homosexualities and French Literature: Cultural Contexts/Critical Texts*, eds. Elaine Marks and George Stambolian (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 114.
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, 1985) 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.
44. Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind," *Feminist Issues*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Summer 1980, p. 108.
45. Monique Wittig, *The Lesbian Body*, trans. Peter Owen (New York: Avon, 1976), originally published as *Le corps lesbien* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1973).
46. I am grateful to Wendy Owen for this phrase.

47. Of course, Freud himself distinguished between “the sexual” and “the genital,” providing the very distinction that Wittig uses against him. See, for instance, “The Development of the Sexual Function” in Freud, *Outline of a Theory of Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1979).
48. A more comprehensive analysis of the Lacanian position is provided in various parts of chapter 2 of this text.
49. Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1987).
50. Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).
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 internalisation of norms is assumed roughly to work, the basic premise and indeed starting point of psychoanalysis is that it does not. The unconscious constantly reveals 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 fictive and repressive notion.
53. See Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” in *Pleasure and Danger*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 267–319. Also in *Pleasure and Danger*, see Carole S. Vance, “Pleasure and Danger: Towards a Politics of Sexuality,” pp. 1–28; Alice Echols, “The Taming of the Id: Feminist Sexual Politics, 1968–83,” pp. 50–72; Amber Hollibaugh, “Desire for the Future: Radical Hope in Pleasure and Passion,” pp. 401–410. See Amber Hollibaugh and Cherríe Moraga, “What We’re Rollin Around in Bed with: Sexual Silences in Feminism” and Alice Echols, “The New Feminism of Yin and Yang,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (London: Virago, 1984); *Heresies*, Vol. No. 12, 1981, the “sex issue”; Samois ed., *Coming to Power*, (Berkeley: Samois, 1981); Dierdre English, Amber Hollibaugh, and Gayle Rubin, “Talking Sex: A Conversation on Sexuality and Feminism,” *Socialist Review*, No. 58, July–August, 1981; Barbara T. Kerr and Mirtha N.

- Quintanales, “the Complexity of Desire: Conversations on Sexuality and Difference,” *Conditions*, #8; Vol. 3, No. 2, 1982, pp. 52–71.
54. Irigaray’s perhaps most controversial claim has been that the structure of the vulva as “two lips touching” constitutes the nonunitary and autoerotic pleasure of women prior to the “separation” of this doubleness through the pleasure-depriving act of penetration by the penis. See Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un*. Along with Monique Plaza and Christine Delphy, Wittig has argued that Irigaray’s valorization of that anatomical specificity is itself an uncritical replication of a reproductive discourse that marks and carves up the female body into artificial “parts” like “vagina,” “clitoris,” 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” as 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 semester 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 masculinist power in particular. The narrative repeatedly falters in its attempt to recount the history which would enshrine that instrument as a vital part of a tradition. The origins cannot be recovered, and the map that might lead to the origins 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 literary 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 Udoff [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987]). He underscores the radical unjustifiability 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.
2. See Carol MacCormack and Marilyn Strathern, eds. *Nature, Culture and Gender* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
 3. For a fuller discussion of these kinds of issues, see Donna Haraway's chapter, "Gender for a Marxist Dictionary: The Sexual Politics of a Word," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, forthcoming).
 4. Gayle Rubin considers this process at length in "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975). Her essay will become a focal point later in this chapter. She uses the notion of the bride-as-gift from Mauss's *Essay on the Gift* to show how women as objects of exchange effectively consolidate and define the social bond between men.
 5. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Principles of Kinship," in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 496.
 6. See Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play," in *The Structuralist Controversy*, eds. Richard Macksey and Eugene Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964); "Linguistics and Grammatology," in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
 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.
 8. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 101–103.
 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' description of the structures of reciprocity within kinship. Sedgwick effectively argues that the flattering attentions 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 unacknowledged desire between men as the explicit and ostensible object of discourse.
 10. Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et parentés*, (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1987).

11. Clearly, Lévi-Strauss misses an opportunity to analyze incest as both fantasy *and* social practice, the two being in no way mutually exclusive.
12. Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, p. 491.
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 preindividuated *jouissance* that characterizes the undifferentiated relation to the mother.
14. I devote a chapter to Lacan's appropriation of Hegel's dialectic of master and slave, called "Lacan: The Opacity of Desire," in my *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).
15. Freud understood the achievement of femininity to require a double-wave of repression: "The girl" not only has to shift libidinal attachment from the mother to the father, but then displace the desire for the father onto some more acceptable object. For an account that gives an almost mythic cast to Lacan's theory, see Sarah Kofman, *The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud's Writings*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 143–148, originally published as *L'Enigme de la femme: La femme dans les textes de Freud* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1980).
16. Jacques Lacan, "The Meaning of the Phallus," in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1985), pp. 83–85. Hereafter, page references to this work will appear in the text.
17. Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1977), p. 131.
18. The feminist literature on masquerade is wide-ranging; the attempt here is restricted to an analysis of masquerade in relation to the problematic of expression and performativity. In other words, the question here is whether masquerade conceals a femininity that might be understood as genuine or authentic, or whether masquerade is the means by which femininity and the contests over its "authenticity" are produced. For a fuller discussion of feminist appropriations of masquerade, see Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940's* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); "Film and Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," *Screen* Vol. 23, Nos. 3–4, September–October 1982, pp. 74–87; "Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body," *October*, Vol. 17, Summer 1981. Gayatri Spivak offers a provocative reading of woman-as-masquerade that draws on Nietzsche and Derrida in "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman," in *Displacement: Derrida and After*, ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983). See also Mary Russo's "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory" (Working Paper, Center for Twentieth-Century Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1985).

19. 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 gender through instituting certain forms of disavowed losses.
20. Significantly, Lacan's discussion of the lesbian is contiguous 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 operation of "denial" in this text is clearly in order.
21. Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," in *Formations of Fantasy*, eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald, Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 35–44. The article was first published in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 10, 1929. Hereafter, page references to this work will appear in the text. See also the fine essay by Stephen Heath that follows, "Joan Riviere and the Masquerade."
22. 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. Carole Vance (Boston: Routledge, 1984), pp. 242–250. Newton and Walton distinguish among erotic identities, erotic roles, 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 contexts. 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 reductive unification of these terms.
23. The notion of a sexual "orientation" has been deftly 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 on 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 univocal.
24. Heath, "Joan Riviere and the Masquerade," pp. 45–61.
25. Stephen Heath points out that the situation that Riviere faced as an intellectual woman in competition for recognition by the psychoanalytic establishment suggests strong parallels, if not an ultimate identification, with the analysand that she describes in the article.
26. Jacqueline Rose, in *Feminine Sexuality*, eds. Mitchell and Rose, p. 85.
27. Jacqueline Rose, "Introduction-II" in *Feminine Sexuality*, eds. Mitchell and Rose, p. 44.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
29. Rose criticizes the work of Moustapha Safouan in particular for failing to understand the incommensurability of the symbolic and the real. See his *La sexualité féminine dans la doctrine freudienne* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1976). I am indebted to Elizabeth Weed for discussing the anti-developmental impetus in Lacan with me.
30. See Friedrich Nietzsche, "First Essay," in *The Genealogy of Morals*, Walter Kaufmann, trans. (New York: Vintage, 1969), for his analysis of slave-morality. Here as elsewhere in his writing, Nietzsche argues that God is created by the will-to-power as a self-debasing act and that the recovery of the will-to-power from this 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 *On the 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 one in which productive power institutes 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.
31. Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, pp. 66–73.
32. See Julia Kristeva *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); *Soleil noir: Dépression et mélancolie* (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 matricidal impulse turned against the female subject and hence is linked with the problem 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 refuse to commit the murders they most profoundly want to commit. The masculine position is thus understood as an externally directed sadism, whereas the feminine is an internally directed masochism. For Kristeva, melancholy is a "voluptuous sadness" that seems tied to the sublimated production of art. The highest form of that sublimation seems to center on the suffering that is its origin. As a result, Kristeva ends the book, abruptly and a bit polemically, extolling the great works of modernism that articulate 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 i, of this text, "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva."

33. See Freud, "The Ego and the Super-Ego (Ego-Ideal)," *The Ego and the Id*, trans. Joan Riviere, ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1960, originally published in 1923), for Freud's discussion of mourning and melancholia and their relation to ego and character formation as well as his discussion of alternative resolutions to the Oedipal conflict. I am grateful to Paul Schwaber for suggesting this chapter to me. Citations of "Mourning and Melancholia" refer to Sigmund Freud, *General Psychological Theory*, ed. Philip Rieff, (New York: MacMillan, 1976), and will appear hereafter in the text.
34. For an interesting discussion of "identification," see Richard Wollheim's "Identification and Imagination: The Inner Structure of a Psychic Mechanism," in *Freud: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Richard Wollheim (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1974), pp. 172–195.
35. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok take exception to this conflation 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-Smirgell, *The Ego-Ideal, A Psychological Essay on the Malady of the Ideal*, trans. Paul Barrows, introduction by Christopher Lasch (New York: Norton, 1985), originally published as *L'ideal du moi*. Her text engages a naïve developmental model of sexuality that degrades homosexuality and regularly engages a polemic against feminism and Lacan.
37. See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, p. 81.
38. Roy Schafer, *A New Language for Psycho-Analysis*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 162. Also of interest are Schafer's earlier distinctions among various sorts of internalizations—introjection, incorporation, identification—in Roy Schafer, *Aspects of Internalization* (New York: International University Press, 1968). For a psychoanalytic history of the terms *internalization* and *identification*, see W. W. Meissner, *Internalization in Psychoanalysis* (New York: International University Press, 1968).
39. This discussion of Abraham and Torok is based on "Deuil ou mélancolie, introjecter-incorporer, réalité métapsychologique et fantasme," in *L'Écorce et le noyau*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1987). Part of this discussion is to be found in English as Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, "Introjection-Incorporation: Mourning or Melancholia," in *Psychoanalysis in France*, eds. Serge Lebovici and Daniel Widlocher (New York: International University Press, 1980), pp. 3–16. See also by the same authors, "Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology," in *The Trial(s) of Psychoanalysis*, ed.

- Francoise Meltzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 75–80; and "A Poetics of Psychoanalysis: 'The Lost Object-Me,'" *Substance*, Vol. 43, 1984, pp. 3–18.
40. Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, p. 68.
41. See Schafer, *A New Language for Psychoanalysis*, p. 177. In this and in his earlier work, *Aspects of Internalization*, Schafer makes clear that the tropes of internalized spaces are phantasmatic constructions, but not processes. This clearly coincides in an interesting way with the thesis 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 remembering process of that body through lesbian love-making performs the "inversion" that reveals the so-called integrated body as fully disintegrated and deerotized 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, for 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 antinarrative) brings those culturally constructed notions of bodily integrity into question.
43. This notion of the surface of the body as projected 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 concept of the body that determines ego-development. Freud continues the above sentence: "[the body] is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface." For an interesting discussion of Freud's view, see Richard Wollheim, "The bodily ego," in *Philosophical Essays on Freud* eds. Richard Wollheim and James Hopkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). For a provocative account of "the skin ego," which, unfortunately, does not consider the implications of its account for the sexed body, see Didier Anzieu, *Le moi-peau*, (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. 267–319. 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.

46. See (or, rather, don't see) Joseph Shepher, ed., *Incest: A Biosocial View* (London: Academic Press, 1985) for a deterministic account of incest.
47. See Michele Z. Rosaldo, "The Use and Abuse of Anthropology: Reflections on Feminism and Cross-Cultural Understanding," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1980.
48. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1962), p. 7.
49. Peter Dews suggests in *The Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 1987) that Lacan's appropriation of the Symbolic from Lévi-Strauss involves a considerable narrowing of the concept: "In Lacan's adaptation of Lévi-Strauss, which transforms the latter's multiple 'symbolic systems' into a single symbolic order, [the] neglect of the possibilities of systems of meaning promoting or masking relations of force remains" (p. 105).

3. Subversive Bodily Acts

1. This section, "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva," was originally published in *Hypatia*, in the special issue on French Feminist Philosophy, Vol. 3, No. 3, Winter, 1989, pp. 104–118.
2. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Walker, introduction by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 132. The original text is *La Révolution du langage poétique*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974).
3. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
4. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language, A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gorz, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 135. This is a collection of essays compiled from two different sources: *Polylogue* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), and *Σημειωτική: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1969).
5. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 239–240.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 240. For an extremely interesting analysis of reproductive

metaphors as descriptive of the process of poetic creativity, see Wendy Owen, "A Riddle in Nine Syllables: Female Creativity in the Poetry of Sylvia Plath," doctoral dissertation, Yale University, Department of English, 1985.

12. Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 239.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
14. Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, Rayna R. Reiter, ed. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), p. 182.
15. See Plato's *Symposium*, 209a: Of the "procreancy . . . of the spirit," he writes that it is the specific capacity of the poet. Hence, poetic creations are understood as sublimated reproductive desire.
16. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980), p. 154.
17. Michel Foucault, ed., *Herculine Barbin, Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth Century Hermaphrodite*, trans. Richard McDongall (New York: Colophon, 1980), originally published as *Herculine Barbin, dite Alexina B. présenté par Michel Foucault* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978). All references will be from the English and French versions of that text.
18. "The notion of 'sex' made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle" Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, p. 154. See chapter 3, section i, where the passage is quoted.
19. "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act: Foucault and Homosexuality," trans. James O'Higgins, originally printed in *Salmagundi*, Vols. 58–59, Fall 1982–Winter 1983, pp. 10–24; reprinted in *Michel Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977–1984*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman, (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 291.
20. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. xv.
21. Michel Foucault, ed., *I, Pierre Rivière, Having Slaughtered My Mother, My Sister, and My Brother: A Case of Parricide in the 19th Century*, trans. Frank Jelinek, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), originally published as *Moi, Pierre Rivière ayant égorgé ma mère, ma soeur et mon frère . . .* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1973).
22. Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), originally published as *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967).
23. See Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of Medusa," in *New French Feminisms*.

24. Quoted in Anne Fausto-Sterling, "Life in the XY Corral," *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1989, Special Issue on Feminism and Science: In Memory of Ruth Bleier, edited by Sue V. Rosser, p. 328. All the remaining citations in this section are from her article and from two articles she cites: David C. Page, et al., "The sex-determining region of the human Y chromosome encodes a finger protein," in *Cell*, No. 51, pp. 1091-1104, and Eva Eicher and Linda Washburn, "Genetic control of primary sex determination in mice," *Annual Review of Genetics*, No. 20, pp. 327-360.
25. Wittig notes that "English compared to French has the reputation of being almost genderless, while French passes for a very gendered language. It is true that strictly speaking, English does not apply the mark of gender to inanimate objects, to things or nonhuman beings. But as far as the categories of the person are concerned, both languages are bearers of gender to the same extent" ("The Mark of Gender," *Feminist Issues*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Fall 1985, p. 3).
26. Although Wittig herself does not argue the point, her theory might account for the violence enacted against sexed subjects—women, lesbians, gay men, to name a few—as the violent enforcement of a category violently constructed. In other words, sexual crimes against these bodies effectively reduce them to their "sex," thereby reaffirming and enforcing the reduction of the category itself. Because discourse is not restricted to writing or speaking, but is also social action, even violent social action, we ought also to understand rape, sexual violence, "queer-bashing" as the category of sex in action.
27. Monique Wittig, "One is Not Born a Woman," *Feminist Issues*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Winter 1981, p. 48.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
29. Wittig, "The Mark of Gender," p. 4.
30. Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind," *Feminist Issues*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Summer 1980, p. 105.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
33. "The Mark of Gender," p. 4.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*
39. Monique Wittig, "Paradigm," in *Homosexualities and French Literature: Cultural Contexts/Critical Texts*, eds. Elaine Marks and George Stambolian (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 119. Consider the radical difference, however, between Wittig's acceptance of the use of language that valorizes the speaking subject as autonomous and universal and Deleuze's Nietzschean effort to displace the speaking "I" as the center of linguistic power. Although both are critical of psychoanalysis, Deleuze's critique of the subject through recourse to the will-to-power sustains closer parallels to the displacement of the speaking subject by the semiotic/unconscious within Lacanian and post-Lacanian psychoanalytic discourse. For Wittig, it appears that sexuality and desire are self-determined articulations of the individual subject, whereas for both Deleuze and his psychoanalytic opponents, desire of necessity displaces and decenters the subject. "Far from presupposing a subject," Deleuze argues, "desire cannot be attained except at the point where someone is deprived of the power of saying 'I,'" Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, [New York: Columbia University Press, 1987], p. 89.
40. She credits the work of Mikhail Bakhtin on a number of occasions for this insight.
41. Monique Wittig, "The Trojan Horse," *Feminist Issues*, Vol. , No. , Fall 1984, p. 47.
42. See "The Point of View: Universal or Particular?" *Feminist Issues*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Fall 1983.
43. See Wittig, "The Trojan Horse."
44. See Monique Wittig, "The Place of Action," in *Three Decades of the French New Novel*, ed. Lois Oppenheimer (New York: International University Press, 1985).
45. Wittig, "The Trojan Horse," p. 48.
46. "The Place of Action," p. 135. In this essay, Wittig distinguishes between a "first" and "second" contract within society: The first is one of radical reciprocity between speaking subjects who exchange words that "guarantee" the entire and exclusive disposition of language to everyone (135); the second contract is one in which words operate to exert a force of domination over others, indeed, to deprive others of the right and social capacity for speech. In this "debased" form of reciprocity, Wittig argues, individuality itself is erased through being addressed in a language that precludes the hearer as a potential speaker. Wittig concludes the essay with the following: "the paradise of the social contract exists only in literature, where the tropisms, by their violence, are able to counter any reduction of the 'I' to a common denominator, to tear open the closely woven material of the common-places, and to continually prevent their organization into a system of compulsory meaning" (139).
47. Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, trans. David LeVay (New York: Avon, 1973), originally published under the same title (Paris: Éditions du Minuit, 1969).

48. Wittig, "The Mark of Gender," p. 9.
49. In "The Social Contract," a paper presented at Columbia University in 1987 (forthcoming in a collection of Wittig's essays, to be published by Beacon Press), Wittig places her own theory of a primary linguistic contract in terms of Rousseau's theory of the social contract. Although she is not explicit in this regard, it appears that she understands the presocial (preheterosexual) contract as a unity of the will—that is, as a general will in Rousseau's romantic sense. For an interesting use of her theory, see Teresa de Lauretis, "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation" in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, no. 2 (May, 1988) and "The Female Body and Heterosexual Presumption," in *Semiotica*, No. 67, Vol. 3–4, 1987, pp. 259–279.
50. Wittig, "The Social Contract."
51. See Wittig, "The Straight Mind," and "One is Not Born a Woman."
52. Wittig, "The Social Contract," p. 10.
53. Wittig, "The Straight Mind," and "The Social Contract."
54. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 148. References in the text are to this essay.
55. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, Boston, and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 4.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
57. Simon Watney, *Policing Desire: AIDS, Pornography, and the Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).
58. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 115.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
61. Foucault's essay "A Preface to Transgression" (in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*) does provide an interesting juxtaposition with Douglas' notion of body boundaries constituted by incest taboos. Originally written in honor of Georges Bataille, this essay explores in part the metaphorical "dirt" of transgressive pleasures and the association of the forbidden orifice with the dirt-covered tomb. See pp. 46–48.
62. Kristeva discusses Mary Douglas work in a short section of *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), originally published as *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1980). Assimilating Douglas' insights to her own reformulation of Lacan, Kristeva writes, "Defilement is what is jettisoned from the *symbolic system*. It is what escapes that social rationality, that logical order on which a social aggregate is based, which then becomes differentiated from a temporary agglomera-

- tion of individuals and, in short, constitutes a *classification system or a structure*" (p. 65).
63. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
64. Iris Marion Young, "Abjection and Oppression: Unconscious Dynamics of Racism, Sexism, and Homophobia," paper presented at the Society of Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy Meetings, Northwestern University, 1988. The paper will be published in the proceedings of the 1988 meetings by the State University of New York Press. It will also be included as part of a larger chapter in her forthcoming *The Politics of Difference*.
65. Parts of the following discussion were published in two different contexts, in my "Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse," in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1989) and "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 3, Winter 1988.
66. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 29.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
68. See the chapter "Role Models" in Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).
69. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
70. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA.: Bay Press, 1983), p. 114.
71. See Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974). See also Clifford Geertz, "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Thought," in *Local Knowledge, Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

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