

GENDER TROUBLE

*Feminism and the
Subversion of Identity*

JUDITH BUTLER

Routledge
New York and London

Published in 1999 by
Routledge
29 West 35th Street
New York, NY 10001

Published in Great Britain by
Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane
London EC4P 4EE

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2002.

Copyright © 1990, 1999 by Routledge

Gender Trouble was originally published in the Routledge book series
Thinking Gender, edited by Linda J. Nicholson.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or
utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now
known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording or in
any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing
from the publishers.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Butler, Judith P.

Gender trouble : feminism and the subversion of identity / Judith
Butler.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Originally published: New York : Routledge, 1990.

ISBN 0-415-92499-5 (pbk.)

1. Feminist theory. 2. Sex role. 3. Sex differences (Psychology)
4. Identity (Psychology) 5. Femininity. I. Title.

HQ1154.B898 1999

305.3—dc21

99-29349

CIP

ISBN 0-203-90275-0 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-90279-3 (Glassbook Format)

Contents

	Preface (1999)	<i>vii</i>
	Preface (1990)	<i>xxvii</i>
ONE	SUBJECTS OF SEX/GENDER/DESIRE	3
I	“Women” as the Subject of Feminism	3
II	The Compulsory Order of Sex/ Gender/Desire	9
III	Gender: The Circular Ruins of Contemporary Debate	11
IV	Theorizing the Binary, the Unitary, and Beyond	18
V	Identity, Sex, and the Metaphysics of Substance	22
VI	Language, Power, and the Strategies of Displacement	33
TWO	PROHIBITION, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND THE PRODUCTION OF THE HETEROSEXUAL MATRIX	45
I	Structuralism’s Critical Exchange	49

Contents

II	Lacan, Riviere, and the Strategies of Masquerade	55
III	Freud and the Melancholia of Gender	73
IV	Gender Complexity and the Limits of Identification	84
V	Reformulating Prohibition as Power	91
THREE	SUBVERSIVE BODILY ACTS	101
I	The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva	101
II	Foucault, Herculine, and the Politics of Sexual Discontinuity	119
III	Monique Wittig: Bodily Disintegration and Fictive Sex	141
IV	Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions	163
CONCLUSION	FROM PARODY TO POLITICS	181
	Notes	191
	Index	217

Preface (1999)

Ten years ago I completed the manuscript of *Gender Trouble* and sent it to Routledge for publication. I did not know that the text would have as wide an audience as it has had, nor did I know that it would constitute a provocative “intervention” in feminist theory or be cited as one of the founding texts of queer theory. The life of the text has exceeded my intentions, and that is surely in part the result of the changing context of its reception. As I wrote it, I understood myself to be in an embattled and oppositional relation to certain forms of feminism, even as I understood the text to be part of feminism itself. I was writing in the tradition of immanent critique that seeks to provoke critical examination of the basic vocabulary of the movement of thought to which it belongs. There was and remains warrant for such a mode of criticism and to distinguish between self-criticism that promises a more democratic and inclusive life for the movement and criticism that seeks to undermine it altogether. Of course, it is always possible to misread the former as the latter, but I would hope that that will not be done in the case of *Gender Trouble*.

In 1989 I was most concerned to criticize a pervasive heterosexual assumption in feminist literary theory. I sought to counter those views that made presumptions about the limits and propriety of gender and restricted the meaning of gender to received notions of masculinity and femininity. It was and remains my view that any feminist theory

Gender Trouble

that restricts the meaning of gender in the presuppositions of its own practice sets up exclusionary gender norms within feminism, often with homophobic consequences. It seemed to me, and continues to seem, that feminism ought to be careful not to idealize certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion. In particular, I opposed those regimes of truth that stipulated that certain kinds of gendered expressions were found to be false or derivative, and others, true and original. The point was not to prescribe a new gendered way of life that might then serve as a model for readers of the text. Rather, the aim of the text was to open up the field of possibility for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized. One might wonder what use “opening up possibilities” finally is, but no one who has understood what it is to live in the social world as what is “impossible,” illegible, unrealizable, unreal, and illegitimate is likely to pose that question.

Gender Trouble sought to uncover the ways in which the very thinking of what is possible in gendered life is foreclosed by certain habitual and violent presumptions. The text also sought to undermine any and all efforts to wield a discourse of truth to delegitimize minority gendered and sexual practices. This doesn't mean that all minority practices are to be condoned or celebrated, but it does mean that we ought to be able to think them before we come to any kinds of conclusions about them. What worried me most were the ways that the panic in the face of such practices rendered them unthinkable. Is the breakdown of gender binaries, for instance, so monstrous, so frightening, that it must be held to be definitionally impossible and heuristically precluded from any effort to think gender?

Some of these kinds of presumptions were found in what was called “French Feminism” at the time, and they enjoyed great popularity among literary scholars and some social theorists.

Even as I opposed what I took to be the heterosexism at the core of sexual difference fundamentalism, I also drew from French poststructuralism to make my points. My work in *Gender Trouble* turned out to be

Preface 1999

one of cultural translation. Poststructuralist theory was brought to bear on U.S. theories of gender and the political predicaments of feminism. If in some of its guises, poststructuralism appears as a formalism, aloof from questions of social context and political aim, that has not been the case with its more recent American appropriations. Indeed, my point was not to “apply” poststructuralism to feminism, but to subject those theories to a specifically feminist reformulation. Whereas some defenders of poststructuralist formalism express dismay at the avowedly “thematic” orientation it receives in works such as *Gender Trouble*, the critiques of poststructuralism within the cultural Left have expressed strong skepticism toward the claim that anything politically progressive can come of its premises. In both accounts, however, poststructuralism is considered something unified, pure, and monolithic. In recent years, however, that theory, or set of theories, has migrated into gender and sexuality studies, postcolonial and race studies. It has lost the formalism of its earlier instance and acquired a new and transplanted life in the domain of cultural theory. There are continuing debates about whether my own work or the work of Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, or Slavoj Žižek belongs to cultural studies or critical theory, but perhaps such questions simply show that the strong distinction between the two enterprises has broken down. There will be theorists who claim that all of the above belong to cultural studies, and there will be cultural studies practitioners who define themselves against all manner of theory (although not, significantly, Stuart Hall, one of the founders of cultural studies in Britain). But both sides of the debate sometimes miss the point that the face of theory has changed precisely through its cultural appropriations. There is a new venue for theory, necessarily impure, where it emerges in and as the very event of cultural translation. This is not the displacement of theory by historicism, nor a simple historicization of theory that exposes the contingent limits of its more generalizable claims. It is, rather, the emergence of theory at the site where cultural horizons meet, where the demand for translation is acute and its promise of success, uncertain.

Gender Trouble

Gender Trouble is rooted in “French Theory,” which is itself a curious American construction. Only in the United States are so many disparate theories joined together as if they formed some kind of unity. Although the book has been translated into several languages and has had an especially strong impact on discussions of gender and politics in Germany, it will emerge in France, if it finally does, much later than in other countries. I mention this to underscore that the apparent Francocentrism of the text is at a significant distance from France and from the life of theory in France. *Gender Trouble* tends to read together, in a syncretic vein, various French intellectuals (Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Lacan, Kristeva, Wittig) who had few alliances with one another and whose readers in France rarely, if ever, read one another. Indeed, the intellectual promiscuity of the text marks it precisely as American and makes it foreign to a French context. So does its emphasis on the Anglo-American sociological and anthropological tradition of “gender” studies, which is distinct from the discourse of “sexual difference” derived from structuralist inquiry. If the text runs the risk of Eurocentrism in the U.S., it has threatened an “Americanization” of theory in France for those few French publishers who have considered it.¹

Of course, “French Theory” is not the only language of this text. It emerges from a long engagement with feminist theory, with the debates on the socially constructed character of gender, with psychoanalysis and feminism, with Gayle Rubin’s extraordinary work on gender, sexuality, and kinship, Esther Newton’s groundbreaking work on drag, Monique Wittig’s brilliant theoretical and fictional writings, and with gay and lesbian perspectives in the humanities. Whereas many feminists in the 1980s assumed that lesbianism meets feminism in lesbian-feminism, *Gender Trouble* sought to refuse the notion that lesbian practice instantiates feminist theory, and set up a more troubled relation between the two terms. Lesbianism in this text does not represent a return to what is most important about being a woman; it does not consecrate femininity or signal a gynocentric world. Lesbianism is not the erotic con-

Preface 1999

summation of a set of political beliefs (sexuality and belief are related in a much more complex fashion, and very often at odds with one another). Instead, the text asks, how do non-normative sexual practices call into question the stability of gender as a category of analysis? How do certain sexual practices compel the question: what is a woman, what is a man? If gender is no longer to be understood as consolidated through normative sexuality, then is there a crisis of gender that is specific to queer contexts?

The idea that sexual practice has the power to destabilize gender emerged from my reading of Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women" and sought to establish that normative sexuality fortifies normative gender. Briefly, one is a woman, according to this framework, to the extent that one functions as one within the dominant heterosexual frame and to call the frame into question is perhaps to lose something of one's sense of place in gender. I take it that this is the first formulation of "gender trouble" in this text. I sought to understand some of the terror and anxiety that some people suffer in "becoming gay," the fear of losing one's place in gender or of not knowing who one will be if one sleeps with someone of the ostensibly "same" gender. This constitutes a certain crisis in ontology experienced at the level of both sexuality and language. This issue has become more acute as we consider various new forms of gendering that have emerged in light of transgenderism and transsexuality, lesbian and gay parenting, new butch and femme identities. When and why, for instance, do some butch lesbians who become parents become "dads" and others become "moms"?

What about the notion, suggested by Kate Bornstein, that a transsexual cannot be described by the noun of "woman" or "man," but must be approached through active verbs that attest to the constant transformation which "is" the new identity or, indeed, the "in-betweenness" that puts the being of gendered identity into question? Although some lesbians argue that butches have nothing to do with "being a man," others insist that their butchness is or was only a route to a desired status

Gender Trouble

as a man. These paradoxes have surely proliferated in recent years, offering evidence of a kind of gender trouble that the text itself did not anticipate.²

But what is the link between gender and sexuality that I sought to underscore? Certainly, I do not mean to claim that forms of sexual practice produce certain genders, but only that under conditions of normative heterosexuality, policing gender is sometimes used as a way of securing heterosexuality. Catharine MacKinnon offers a formulation of this problem that resonates with my own at the same time that there are, I believe, crucial and important differences between us. She writes:

Stopped as an attribute of a person, sex inequality takes the form of gender; moving as a relation between people, it takes the form of sexuality. Gender emerges as the congealed form of the sexualization of inequality between men and women.³

In this view, sexual hierarchy produces and consolidates gender. It is not heterosexual normativity that produces and consolidates gender, but the gender hierarchy that is said to underwrite heterosexual relations. If gender hierarchy produces and consolidates gender, and if gender hierarchy presupposes an operative notion of gender, then gender is what causes gender, and the formulation culminates in tautology. It may be that MacKinnon wants merely to outline the self-reproducing mechanism of gender hierarchy, but this is not what she has said.

Is “gender hierarchy” sufficient to explain the conditions for the production of gender? To what extent does gender hierarchy serve a more or less compulsory heterosexuality, and how often are gender norms policed precisely in the service of shoring up heterosexual hegemony?

Katherine Franke, a contemporary legal theorist, makes innovative use of both feminist and queer perspectives to note that by assuming the primacy of gender hierarchy to the production of gender, MacKinnon also accepts a presumptively heterosexual model for thinking about sexuality. Franke offers an alternative model of gender

Preface 1999

discrimination to MacKinnon's, effectively arguing that sexual harassment is the paradigmatic allegory for the production of gender. Not all discrimination can be understood as harassment. The act of harassment may be one in which a person is "made" into a certain gender. But there are others ways of enforcing gender as well. Thus, for Franke, it is important to make a provisional distinction between gender and sexual discrimination. Gay people, for instance, may be discriminated against in positions of employment because they fail to "appear" in accordance with accepted gendered norms. And the sexual harassment of gay people may well take place not in the service of shoring up gender hierarchy, but in promoting gender normativity.

Whereas MacKinnon offers a powerful critique of sexual harassment, she institutes a regulation of another kind: to have a gender means to have entered already into a heterosexual relationship of subordination. At an analytic level, she makes an equation that resonates with some dominant forms of homophobic argument. One such view prescribes and condones the sexual ordering of gender, maintaining that men who are men will be straight, women who are women will be straight. There is another set of views, Franke's included, which offers a critique precisely of this form of gender regulation. There is thus a difference between sexist and feminist views on the relation between gender and sexuality: the sexist claims that a woman only exhibits her womanness in the act of heterosexual coitus in which her subordination becomes her pleasure (an essence emanates and is confirmed in the sexualized subordination of women); a feminist view argues that gender should be overthrown, eliminated, or rendered fatally ambiguous precisely because it is always a sign of subordination for women. The latter accepts the power of the former's orthodox description, accepts that the former's description already operates as powerful ideology, but seeks to oppose it.

I belabor this point because some queer theorists have drawn an analytic distinction between gender and sexuality, refusing a causal or structural link between them. This makes good sense from one

Gender Trouble

perspective: if what is meant by this distinction is that heterosexual normativity ought *not* to order gender, and that such ordering ought to be opposed, I am firmly in favor of this view.⁴ If, however, what is meant by this is that (descriptively speaking), there is no sexual regulation of gender, then I think an important, but not exclusive, dimension of how homophobia works is going unrecognized by those who are clearly most eager to combat it. It is important for me to concede, however, that the performance of gender subversion can indicate nothing about sexuality or sexual practice. Gender can be rendered ambiguous without disturbing or reorienting normative sexuality at all. Sometimes gender ambiguity can operate precisely to contain or deflect non-normative sexual practice and thereby work to keep normative sexuality intact.⁵ Thus, no correlation can be drawn, for instance, between drag or transgender and sexual practice, and the distribution of hetero-, bi-, and homo-inclinations cannot be predictably mapped onto the travels of gender bending or changing.

Much of my work in recent years has been devoted to clarifying and revising the theory of performativity that is outlined in *Gender Trouble*.⁶ It is difficult to say precisely what performativity is not only because my own views on what “performativity” might mean have changed over time, most often in response to excellent criticisms,⁷ but because so many others have taken it up and given it their own formulations. I originally took my clue on how to read the performativity of gender from Jacques Derrida’s reading of Kafka’s “Before the Law.” There the one who waits for the law, sits before the door of the law, attributes a certain force to the law for which one waits. The anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object. I wondered whether we do not labor under a similar expectation concerning gender, that it operates as an interior essence that might be disclosed, an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates. In the first instance, then, the performativity of gender revolves around this metalepsis, the way in which

Preface 1999

the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself. Secondly, performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration.⁸

Several important questions have been posed to this doctrine, and one seems especially noteworthy to mention here. The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body. In this way, it showed that what we take to be an “internal” feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures. Does this mean that everything that is understood as “internal” about the psyche is therefore evacuated, and that internality is a false metaphor? Although *Gender Trouble* clearly drew upon the metaphor of an internal psyche in its early discussion of gender melancholy, that emphasis was not brought forward into the thinking of performativity itself.⁹ Both *The Psychic Life of Power* and several of my recent articles on psychoanalytic topics have sought to come to terms with this problem, what many have seen as a problematic break between the early and later chapters of this book. Although I would deny that all of the internal world of the psyche is but an effect of a stylized set of acts, I continue to think that it is a significant theoretical mistake to take the “internality” of the psychic world for granted. Certain features of the world, including people we know and lose, do become “internal” features of the self, but they are transformed through that interiorization, and that inner world, as the Kleinians call it, is constituted precisely as a consequence of the interiorizations that a psyche performs. This suggests that there may well be a psychic theory of performativity at work that calls for greater exploration.

Although this text does not answer the question of whether the materiality of the body is fully constructed, that has been the focus of much of my subsequent work, which I hope will prove clarifying for the

Gender Trouble

reader.¹⁰ The question of whether or not the theory of performativity can be transposed onto matters of race has been explored by several scholars.¹¹ I would note here not only that racial presumptions invariably underwrite the discourse on gender in ways that need to be made explicit, but that race and gender ought not to be treated as simple analogies. I would therefore suggest that the question to ask is not whether the theory of performativity is transposable onto race, but what happens to the theory when it tries to come to grips with race. Many of these debates have centered on the status of “construction,” whether race is constructed in the same way as gender. My view is that no single account of construction will do, and that these categories always work as background for one another, and they often find their most powerful articulation through one another. Thus, the sexualization of racial gender norms calls to be read through multiple lenses at once, and the analysis surely illuminates the limits of gender as an exclusive category of analysis.¹²

Although I’ve enumerated some of the academic traditions and debates that have animated this book, it is not my purpose to offer a full apologia in these brief pages. There is one aspect of the conditions of its production that is not always understood about the text: it was produced not merely from the academy, but from convergent social movements of which I have been a part, and within the context of a lesbian and gay community on the east coast of the United States in which I lived for fourteen years prior to the writing of this book. Despite the dislocation of the subject that the text performs, there is a person here: I went to many meetings, bars, and marches and saw many kinds of genders, understood myself to be at the crossroads of some of them, and encountered sexuality at several of its cultural edges. I knew many people who were trying to find their way in the midst of a significant movement for sexual recognition and freedom, and felt the exhilaration and frustration that goes along with being a part of that movement both in its hopefulness and internal dissension. At the same time that I was ensconced in the academy, I was also living

Preface 1999

a life outside those walls, and though *Gender Trouble* is an academic book, it began, for me, with a crossing-over, sitting on Rehoboth Beach, wondering whether I could link the different sides of my life. That I can write in an autobiographical mode does not, I think, relocate this subject that I am, but perhaps it gives the reader a sense of solace that there is someone here (I will suspend for the moment the problem that this someone is given in language).

It has been one of the most gratifying experiences for me that the text continues to move outside the academy to this day. At the same time that the book was taken up by Queer Nation, and some of its reflections on the theatricality of queer self-presentation resonated with the tactics of Act Up, it was among the materials that also helped to prompt members of the American Psychoanalytic Association and the American Psychological Association to reassess some of their current doxa on homosexuality. The questions of performative gender were appropriated in different ways in the visual arts, at Whitney exhibitions, and at the Otis School for the Arts in Los Angeles, among others. Some of its formulations on the subject of “women” and the relation between sexuality and gender also made its way into feminist jurisprudence and antidiscrimination legal scholarship in the work of Vicki Schultz, Katherine Franke, and Mary Jo Frug.

In turn, I have been compelled to revise some of my positions in *Gender Trouble* by virtue of my own political engagements. In the book, I tend to conceive of the claim of “universality” in exclusive negative and exclusionary terms. However, I came to see the term has important strategic use precisely as a non-substantial and open-ended category as I worked with an extraordinary group of activists first as a board member and then as board chair of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (1994–7), an organization that represents sexual minorities on a broad range of human rights issues. There I came to understand how the assertion of universality can be proleptic and performative, conjuring a reality that does not yet exist, and holding out the possibility for a convergence of cultural horizons that have not yet

Gender Trouble

met. Thus, I arrived at a second view of universality in which it is defined as a future-oriented labor of cultural translation.¹³ More recently, I have been compelled to relate my work to political theory and, once again, to the concept of universality in a co-authored book that I am writing with Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek on the theory of hegemony and its implications for a theoretically activist Left (to be published by Verso in 2000).

Another practical dimension of my thinking has taken place in relationship to psychoanalysis as both a scholarly and clinical enterprise. I am currently working with a group of progressive psychoanalytic therapists on a new journal, *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, that seeks to bring clinical and scholarly work into productive dialogue on questions of sexuality, gender, and culture.

Both critics and friends of *Gender Trouble* have drawn attention to the difficulty of its style. It is no doubt strange, and maddening to some, to find a book that is not easily consumed to be “popular” according to academic standards. The surprise over this is perhaps attributable to the way we underestimate the reading public, its capacity and desire for reading complicated and challenging texts, when the complication is not gratuitous, when the challenge is in the service of calling taken-for-granted truths into question, when the taken for grantedness of those truths is, indeed, oppressive.

I think that style is a complicated terrain, and not one that we unilaterally choose or control with the purposes we consciously intend. Fredric Jameson made this clear in his early book on Sartre. Certainly, one can practice styles, but the styles that become available to you are not entirely a matter of choice. Moreover, neither grammar nor style are politically neutral. Learning the rules that govern intelligible speech is an inculcation into normalized language, where the price of not conforming is the loss of intelligibility itself. As Drucilla Cornell, in the tradition of Adorno, reminds me: there is nothing radical about common sense. It would be a mistake to think that received grammar is the best vehicle for expressing radical views, given the constraints

Preface 1999

that grammar imposes upon thought, indeed, upon the thinkable itself. But formulations that twist grammar or that implicitly call into question the subject-verb requirements of propositional sense are clearly irritating for some. They produce more work for their readers, and sometimes their readers are offended by such demands. Are those who are offended making a legitimate request for “plain speaking” or does their complaint emerge from a consumer expectation of intellectual life? Is there, perhaps, a value to be derived from such experiences of linguistic difficulty? If gender itself is naturalized through grammatical norms, as Monique Wittig has argued, then the alteration of gender at the most fundamental epistemic level will be conducted, in part, through contesting the grammar in which gender is given.

The demand for lucidity forgets the ruses that motor the ostensibly “clear” view. Avital Ronell recalls the moment in which Nixon looked into the eyes of the nation and said, “let me make one thing perfectly clear” and then proceeded to lie. What travels under the sign of “clarity,” and what would be the price of failing to deploy a certain critical suspicion when the arrival of lucidity is announced? Who devises the protocols of “clarity” and whose interests do they serve? What is foreclosed by the insistence on parochial standards of transparency as requisite for all communication? What does “transparency” keep obscure?

I grew up understanding something of the violence of gender norms: an uncle incarcerated for his anatomically anomalous body, deprived of family and friends, living out his days in an “institute” in the Kansas prairies; gay cousins forced to leave their homes because of their sexuality, real and imagined; my own tempestuous coming out at the age of 16; and a subsequent adult landscape of lost jobs, lovers, and homes. All of this subjected me to strong and scarring condemnation but, luckily, did not prevent me from pursuing pleasure and insisting on a legitimating recognition for my sexual life. It was difficult to bring this violence into view precisely because gender was so taken for granted at the same time that it was violently policed. It was assumed either to be

Gender Trouble

a natural manifestation of sex or a cultural constant that no human agency could hope to revise. I also came to understand something of the violence of the foreclosed life, the one that does not get named as “living,” the one whose incarceration implies a suspension of life, or a sustained death sentence. The dogged effort to “denaturalize” gender in this text emerges, I think, from a strong desire both to counter the normative violence implied by ideal morphologies of sex and to uproot the pervasive assumptions about natural or presumptive heterosexuality that are informed by ordinary and academic discourses on sexuality. The writing of this denaturalization was not done simply out of a desire to play with language or prescribe theatrical antics in the place of “real” politics, as some critics have conjectured (as if theatre and politics are always distinct). It was done from a desire to live, to make life possible, and to rethink the possible as such. What would the world have to be like for my uncle to live in the company of family, friends, or extended kinship of some other kind? How must we rethink the ideal morphological constraints upon the human such that those who fail to approximate the norm are not condemned to a death within life?¹⁴

Some readers have asked whether *Gender Trouble* seeks to expand the realm of gender possibilities for a reason. They ask, for what purpose are such new configurations of gender devised, and how ought we to judge among them? The question often involves a prior premise, namely, that the text does not address the normative or prescriptive dimension of feminist thought. “Normative” clearly has at least two meanings in this critical encounter, since the word is one I use often, mainly to describe the mundane violence performed by certain kinds of gender ideals. I usually use “normative” in a way that is synonymous with “pertaining to the norms that govern gender.” But the term “normative” also pertains to ethical justification, how it is established, and what concrete consequences proceed therefrom. One critical question posed of *Gender Trouble* has been: how do we proceed to make judgments on how gender is to be lived on the basis of the theoretical descriptions offered here? It is not possible to oppose the “normative” forms of gender without at the

Preface 1999

same time subscribing to a certain normative view of how the gendered world ought to be. I want to suggest, however, that the positive normative vision of this text, such as it is, does not and cannot take the form of a prescription: “subvert gender in the way that I say, and life will be good.”

Those who make such prescriptions or who are willing to decide between subversive and unsubversive expressions of gender, base their judgments on a description. Gender appears in this or that form, and then a normative judgment is made about those appearances and on the basis of what appears. But what conditions the domain of appearance for gender itself? We may be tempted to make the following distinction: a *descriptive* account of gender includes considerations of what makes gender intelligible, an inquiry into its conditions of possibility, whereas a *normative* account seeks to answer the question of which expressions of gender are acceptable, and which are not, supplying persuasive reasons to distinguish between such expressions in this way. The question, however, of what qualifies as “gender” is itself already a question that attests to a pervasively normative operation of power, a fugitive operation of “what will be the case” under the rubric of “what is the case.” Thus, the very description of the field of gender is no sense prior to, or separable from, the question of its normative operation.

I am not interested in delivering judgments on what distinguishes the subversive from the unsubversive. Not only do I believe that such judgments cannot be made out of context, but that they cannot be made in ways that endure through time (“contexts” are themselves posited unities that undergo temporal change and expose their essential disunity). Just as metaphors lose their metaphoricity as they congeal through time into concepts, so subversive performances always run the risk of becoming deadening clichés through their repetition and, most importantly, through their repetition within commodity culture where “subversion” carries market value. The effort to name the criterion for subversiveness will always fail, and ought to. So what is at stake in using the term at all?

Gender Trouble

What continues to concern me most is the following kinds of questions: what will and will not constitute an intelligible life, and how do presumptions about normative gender and sexuality determine in advance what will qualify as the “human” and the “livable”? In other words, how do normative gender presumptions work to delimit the very field of description that we have for the human? What is the means by which we come to see this delimiting power, and what are the means by which we transform it?

The discussion of drag that *Gender Trouble* offers to explain the constructed and performative dimension of gender is not precisely *an example* of subversion. It would be a mistake to take it as the paradigm of subversive action or, indeed, as a model for political agency. The point is rather different. If one thinks that one sees a man dressed as a woman or a woman dressed as a man, then one takes the first term of each of those perceptions as the “reality” of gender: the gender that is introduced through the simile lacks “reality,” and is taken to constitute an illusory appearance. In such perceptions in which an ostensible reality is coupled with an unreality, we think we know what the reality is, and take the secondary appearance of gender to be mere artifice, play, falsehood, and illusion. But what is the sense of “gender reality” that founds this perception in this way? Perhaps we think we know what the anatomy of the person is (sometimes we do not, and we certainly have not appreciated the variation that exists at the level of anatomical description). Or we derive that knowledge from the clothes that the person wears, or how the clothes are worn. This is naturalized knowledge, even though it is based on a series of cultural inferences, some of which are highly erroneous. Indeed, if we shift the example from drag to transsexuality, then it is no longer possible to derive a judgment about stable anatomy from the clothes that cover and articulate the body. That body may be preoperative, transitional, or postoperative; even “seeing” the body may not answer the question: for *what are the categories through which one sees?* The moment in which one’s staid and usual cultural perceptions fail,

when one cannot with surety read the body that one sees, is precisely the moment when one is no longer sure whether the body encountered is that of a man or a woman. The vacillation between the categories itself constitutes the experience of the body in question.

When such categories come into question, the *reality* of gender is also put into crisis: it becomes unclear how to distinguish the real from the unreal. And this is the occasion in which we come to understand that what we take to be “real,” what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality. Call it subversive or call it something else. Although this insight does not in itself constitute a political revolution, no political revolution is possible without a radical shift in one’s notion of the possible and the real. And sometimes this shift comes as a result of certain kinds of practices that precede their explicit theorization, and which prompt a rethinking of our basic categories: what is gender, how is it produced and reproduced, what are its possibilities? At this point, the sedimented and reified field of gender “reality” is understood as one that might be made differently and, indeed, less violently.

The point of this text is not to celebrate drag as the expression of a true and model gender (even as it is important to resist the belittling of drag that sometimes takes place), but to show that the naturalized knowledge of gender operates as a preemptive and violent circumscription of reality. To the extent the gender norms (ideal dimorphism, heterosexual complementarity of bodies, ideals and rule of proper and improper masculinity and femininity, many of which are underwritten by racial codes of purity and taboos against miscegenation) establish what will and will not be intelligibly human, what will and will not be considered to be “real,” they establish the ontological field in which bodies may be given legitimate expression. If there is a positive normative task in *Gender Trouble*, it is to insist upon the extension of this legitimacy to bodies that have been regarded as false, unreal, and unintelligible. Drag is an example that is meant to establish that “reality” is

Gender Trouble

not as fixed as we generally assume it to be. The purpose of the example is to expose the tenuousness of gender “reality” in order to counter the violence performed by gender norms.

In this text as elsewhere I have tried to understand what political agency might be, given that it cannot be isolated from the dynamics of power from which it is wrought. The iterability of performativity is a theory of agency, one that cannot disavow power as the condition of its own possibility. This text does not sufficiently explain performativity in terms of its social, psychic, corporeal, and temporal dimensions. In some ways, the continuing work of that clarification, in response to numerous excellent criticisms, guides most of my subsequent publications.

Other concerns have emerged over this text in the last decade, and I have sought to answer them through various publications. On the status of the materiality of the body, I have offered a reconsideration and revision of my views in *Bodies that Matter*. On the question of the necessity of the category of “women” for feminist analysis, I have revised and expanded my views in “Contingent Foundations” to be found in the volume I coedited with Joan W. Scott, *Feminists Theorize the Political* (Routledge, 1993) and in the collectively authored *Feminist Contentions* (Routledge, 1995).

I do not believe that poststructuralism entails the death of autobiographical writing, but it does draw attention to the difficulty of the “I” to express itself through the language that is available to it. For this “I” that you read is in part a consequence of the grammar that governs the availability of persons in language. I am not outside the language that structures me, but neither am I determined by the language that makes this “I” possible. This is the bind of self-expression, as I understand it. What it means is that you never receive me apart from the grammar that establishes my availability to you. If I treat that grammar as pellucid, then I fail to call attention precisely to that sphere of language that establishes and disestablishes intelligibility, and that would be precisely

Preface 1999

to thwart my own project as I have described it to you here. I am not trying to be difficult, but only to draw attention to a difficulty without which no “I” can appear.

This difficulty takes on a specific dimension when approached from a psychoanalytic perspective. In my efforts to understand the opacity of the “I” in language, I have turned increasingly to psychoanalysis since the publication of *Gender Trouble*. The usual effort to polarize the theory of the psyche from the theory of power seems to me to be counter-productive, for part of what is so oppressive about social forms of gender is the psychic difficulties they produce. I sought to consider the ways in which Foucault and psychoanalysis might be thought together in *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford, 1997). I have also made use of psychoanalysis to curb the occasional voluntarism of my view of performativity without thereby undermining a more general theory of agency. *Gender Trouble* sometimes reads as if gender is simply a self-invention or that the psychic meaning of a gendered presentation might be read directly off its surface. Both of those postulates have had to be refined over time. Moreover, my theory sometimes waffles between understanding performativity as linguistic and casting it as theatrical. I have come to think that the two are invariably related, chiasmically so, and that a reconsideration of the speech act as an instance of power invariably draws attention to both its theatrical and linguistic dimensions. In *Excitable Speech*, I sought to show that the speech act is at once performed (and thus theatrical, presented to an audience, subject to interpretation), and linguistic, inducing a set of effects through its implied relation to linguistic conventions. If one wonders how a linguistic theory of the speech act relates to bodily gestures, one need only consider that speech itself is a bodily act with specific linguistic consequences. Thus speech belongs exclusively neither to corporeal presentation nor to language, and its status as word and deed is necessarily ambiguous. This ambiguity has consequences for the practice of coming out, for the insurrectionary power of the speech act, for language as a condition of both bodily seduction and the threat of injury.

Gender Trouble

If I were to rewrite this book under present circumstances, I would include a discussion of transgender and intersexuality, the way that ideal gender dimorphism works in both sorts of discourses, the different relations to surgical intervention that these related concerns sustain. I would also include a discussion on racialized sexuality and, in particular, how taboos against miscegenation (and the romanticization of cross-racial sexual exchange) are essential to the naturalized and denaturalized forms that gender takes. I continue to hope for a coalition of sexual minorities that will transcend the simple categories of identity, that will refuse the erasure of bisexuality, that will counter and dissipate the violence imposed by restrictive bodily norms. I would hope that such a coalition would be based on the irreducible complexity of sexuality and its implication in various dynamics of discursive and institutional power, and that no one will be too quick to reduce power to hierarchy and to refuse its productive political dimensions. Even as I think that gaining recognition for one's status as a sexual minority is a difficult task within reigning discourses of law, politics, and language, I continue to consider it a necessity for survival. The mobilization of identity categories for the purposes of politicization always remain threatened by the prospect of identity becoming an instrument of the power one opposes. That is no reason not to use, and be used, by identity. There is no political position purified of power, and perhaps that impurity is what produces agency as the potential interruption and reversal of regulatory regimes. Those who are deemed "unreal" nevertheless lay hold of the real, a laying hold that happens in concert, and a vital instability is produced by that performative surprise. This book is written then as part of the cultural life of a collective struggle that has had, and will continue to have, some success in increasing the possibilities for a livable life for those who live, or try to live, on the sexual margins.¹⁵

Judith Butler
Berkeley, California
June, 1999

Preface (1990)

Contemporary feminist debates over the meanings of gender lead time and again to a certain sense of trouble, as if the indeterminacy of gender might eventually culminate in the failure of feminism. Perhaps trouble need not carry such a negative valence. To make trouble was, within the reigning discourse of my childhood, something one should never do precisely because that would get one *in* trouble. The rebellion and its reprimand seemed to be caught up in the same terms, a phenomenon that gave rise to my first critical insight into the subtle ruse of power: the prevailing law threatened one with trouble, even put one in trouble, all to keep one out of trouble. Hence, I concluded that trouble is inevitable and the task, how best to make it, what best way to be in it. As time went by, further ambiguities arrived on the critical scene. I noted that trouble sometimes euphemized some fundamentally mysterious problem usually related to the alleged mystery of all things feminine. I read Beauvoir who explained that to be a woman within the terms of a masculinist culture is to be a source of mystery and unknowability for men, and this seemed confirmed somehow when I read Sartre for whom all desire, problematically presumed as heterosexual and masculine, was defined as *trouble*. For that masculine subject of desire, trouble became a scandal with the sudden intrusion, the unanticipated agency, of a female “object” who inexplicably returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place and authority of the

Gender Trouble

masculine position. The radical dependency of the masculine subject on the female “Other” suddenly exposes his autonomy as illusory. That particular dialectical reversal of power, however, couldn’t quite hold my attention—although others surely did. Power seemed to be more than an exchange between subjects or a relation of constant inversion between and subject and an Other; indeed, power appeared to operate in the production of that very binary frame for thinking about gender. I asked, what configuration of power constructs the subject and the Other, that binary relation between “men” and “women,” and the internal stability of those terms? What restriction is here at work? Are those terms untroubling only to the extent that they conform to a heterosexual matrix for conceptualizing gender and desire? What happens to the subject and to the stability of gender categories when the epistemic regime of presumptive heterosexuality is unmasked as that which produces and reifies these ostensible categories of ontology?

But how can an epistemic/ontological regime be brought into question? What best way to trouble the gender categories that support gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality? Consider the fate of “female trouble,” that historical configuration of a nameless female indisposition, which thinly veiled the notion that being female is a natural indisposition. Serious as the medicalization of women’s bodies is, the term is also laughable, and laughter in the face of serious categories is indispensable for feminism. Without a doubt, feminism continues to require its own forms of serious play. *Female Trouble* is also the title of the John Waters film that features Divine, the hero/heroine of *Hairspray* as well, whose impersonation of women implicitly suggests that gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real. Her/his performance destabilizes the very distinctions between the natural and the artificial, depth and surface, inner and outer through which discourse about genders almost always operates. Is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established? Does being female constitute a “natural fact” or a cultural performance, or is “naturalness” constituted

Preface 1990

through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex? Divine notwithstanding, gender practices within gay and lesbian cultures often thematize “the natural” in parodic contexts that bring into relief the performative construction of an original and true sex. What other foundational categories of identity—the binary of sex, gender, and the body—can be shown as productions that create the effect of the natural, the original, and the inevitable?

To expose the foundational categories of sex, gender, and desire as effects of a specific formation of power requires a form of critical inquiry that Foucault, reformulating Nietzsche, designates as “genealogy.” A genealogical critique refuses to search for the origins of gender, the inner truth of female desire, a genuine or authentic sexual identity that repression has kept from view; rather, genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and *cause* those identity categories that are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin. The task of this inquiry is to center on—and decenter—such defining institutions: phallogocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality.

Precisely because “female” no longer appears to be a stable notion, its meaning is as troubled and unfixed as “woman,” and because both terms gain their troubled significations only as relational terms, this inquiry takes as its focus gender and the relational analysis it suggests. Further, it is no longer clear that feminist theory ought to try to settle the questions of primary identity in order to get on with the task of politics. Instead, we ought to ask, what political possibilities are the consequence of a radical critique of the categories of identity. What new shape of politics emerges when identity as a common ground no longer constrains the discourse on feminist politics? And to what extent does the effort to locate a common identity as the foundation for a feminist politics preclude a radical inquiry into the political construction and regulation of identity itself?

* * *

Gender Trouble

This text is divided into three chapters that effect a critical genealogy of gender categories in very different discursive domains. Chapter 1, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," reconsiders the status of "women" as the subject of feminism and the sex/gender distinction. Compulsory heterosexuality and phallogocentrism are understood as regimes of power/discourse with often divergent ways of answering central question of gender discourse: how does language construct the categories of sex? Does "the feminine" resist representation within language? Is language understood as phallogocentric (Luce Irigaray's question)? Is "the feminine" the only sex represented within a language that conflates the female and the sexual (Monique Wittig's contention)? Where and how do compulsory heterosexuality and phallogocentrism converge? Where are the points of breakage between? How does language itself produce the fiction construction of "sex" that supports these various regimes of power? Within a language of presumptive heterosexuality, what sorts of continuities are assumed to exist among sex, gender, and desire? Are these terms discrete? What kinds of cultural practices produce subversive discontinuity and dissonance among sex, gender, and desire and call into question their alleged relations?

Chapter 2, "Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix," offers a selective reading of structuralism, psychoanalytic and feminist accounts of the incest taboo as the mechanism that tries to enforce discrete and internally coherent gender identities within a heterosexual frame. The question of homosexuality is, within some psychoanalytic discourse, invariably associated with forms of cultural unintelligibility and, in the case of lesbianism, with the desexualization of the female body. On the other hand, the uses of psychoanalytic theory for an account of complex gender "identities" is pursued through an analysis of identity, identification, and masquerade in Joan Riviere and other psychoanalytic literature. Once the incest taboo is subjected to Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis in *The History of Sexuality*, that prohibitive or juridical structure is shown both to instate compulsory heterosexuality within a masculinist sexual

Preface 1990

economy and to enable a critical challenge to that economy. Is psychoanalysis an antifoundationalist inquiry that affirms the kind of sexual complexity that effectively deregulates rigid and hierarchical sexual codes, or does it maintain an unacknowledged set of assumptions about the foundations of identity that work in favor of those very hierarchies?

The last chapter, "Subversive Bodily Acts," begins with a critical consideration of the construction of the maternal body in Julia Kristeva in order to show the implicit norms that govern the cultural intelligibility of sex and sexuality in her work. Although Foucault is engaged to provide a critique of Kristeva, a close examination of some of Foucault's own work reveals a problematic indifference to sexual difference. His critique of the category of sex, however, provides an insight into the regulatory practices of some contemporary medical fictions designed to designate univocal sex. Monique Wittig's theory and fiction propose a "disintegration" of culturally constituted bodies, suggesting that morphology itself is a consequence of a hegemonic conceptual scheme. The final section of this chapter, "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions," considers the boundary and surface of bodies as politically constructed, drawing on the work of Mary Douglas and Julia Kristeva. As a strategy to denaturalize and resignify bodily categories, I describe and propose a set of parodic practices based in a performative theory of gender acts that disrupt the categories of the body, sex, gender, and sexuality and occasion their subversive resignification and proliferation beyond the binary frame.

It seems that every text has more sources than it can reconstruct within its own terms. These are sources that define and inform the very language of the text in ways that would require a thorough unraveling of the text itself to be understood, and of course there would be no guarantee that that unraveling would ever stop. Although I have offered a childhood story to begin this preface, it is a fable irreducible to fact. Indeed, the purpose here more generally is to trace the way in which gender fables establish and circulate the misnomer of natural facts. It is

Gender Trouble

clearly impossible to recover the origins of these essays, to locate the various moments that have enabled this text. The texts are assembled to facilitate a political convergence of feminism, gay and lesbian perspectives on gender, and poststructuralist theory. Philosophy is the predominant disciplinary mechanism that currently mobilizes this author-subject, although it rarely if ever appears separated from other discourses. This inquiry seeks to affirm those positions on the critical boundaries of disciplinary life. The point is not to stay marginal, but to participate in whatever network or marginal zones is spawned from other disciplinary centers and that, together, constitute a multiple displacement of those authorities. The complexity of gender requires an interdisciplinary and postdisciplinary set of discourses in order to resist the domestication of gender studies or women studies within the academy and to radicalize the notion of feminist critique.

The writing of this text was made possible by a number of institutional and individual forms of support. The American Council of Learned Societies provided a Recent Recipient of the Ph.D. Fellowship for the fall of 1987, and the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton provided fellowship, housing, and provocative argumentation during the 1987–1988 academic year. The George Washington University Faculty Research Grant also supported my research during the summers of 1987 and 1988. Joan W. Scott has been an invaluable and incisive critic throughout various stages of this manuscript. Her commitment to a critical rethinking of the presuppositional terms of feminist politics has challenged and inspired me. The “Gender Seminar” assembled at the Institute for Advanced Study under Joan Scott’s direction helped me to clarify and elaborate my views by virtue of the significant and provocative divisions in our collective thinking. Hence, I thank Lila Abu-Lughod, Yasmine Ergas, Donna Haraway, Evelyn Fox Keller, Dorinne Kondo, Rayna Rapp, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Louise Tilly. My students in the seminar “Gender, Identity, and Desire,” offered at Wesleyan University and at Yale in 1985 and 1986, respectively, were indispensable for their willingness to

Preface 1990

imagine alternatively gendered worlds. I also appreciate the variety of critical responses that I received on presentations of parts of this work from the Princeton Women's Studies Colloquium, the Humanities Center at Johns Hopkins University, the University of Notre Dame, the University of Kansas, Amherst College, and the Yale University School of Medicine. My acknowledgment also goes to Linda Singer, whose persistent radicalism has been invaluable, Sandra Bartky for her work and her timely words of encouragement, Linda Nicholson for her editorial and critical advice, and Linda Anderson for her acute political intuitions. I also thank the following individuals, friends, and colleagues who shaped and supported my thinking: Eloise Moore Aggar, Inés Azar, Peter Caws, Nancy F. Cott, Kathy Natanson, Lois Natanson, Maurice Natanson, Stacy Pies, Josh Shapiro, Margaret Soltan, Robert V. Stone, Richard Vann, and Eszti Votaw. I thank Sandra Schmidt for her fine work in helping to prepare this manuscript, and Meg Gilbert for her assistance. I also thank Maureen MacGrogan for encouraging this project and others with her humor, patience, and fine editorial guidance.

As before, I thank Wendy Owen for her relentless imagination, keen criticism, and for the provocation of her work.

Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix

The straight mind continues to affirm that incest, and not homosexuality represents its major interdiction. Thus, when thought by the straight mind, homosexuality is nothing but heterosexuality.

—MONIQUE WITTIG, “THE STRAIGHT MIND”

On occasion feminist theory has been drawn to the thought of an origin, a time before what some would call “patriarchy” that would provide an imaginary perspective from which to establish the contingency of the history of women’s oppression. Debates have emerged over whether prepatriarchal cultures have existed, whether they were matriarchal or matrilineal in structure, whether patriarchy could be shown to have a beginning and, hence, be subject to an end. The critical impetus behind these kinds of inquiry sought understandably to show that the antifeminist argument in favor of the inevitability of patriarchy constituted a reification and naturalization of a *historical* and contingent phenomenon.

Although the turn to a prepatriarchal state of culture was intended to expose the self-reification of patriarchy, that prepatriarchal scheme has proven to be a different sort of reification. More recently, some feminists have offered a reflexive critique of some reified constructs within feminism itself. The very notion of “patriarchy” has threatened to become a universalizing concept that overrides or reduces distinct

Gender Trouble

articulations of gender asymmetry in different cultural contexts. As feminism has sought to become integrally related to struggles against racial and colonialist oppression, it has become increasingly important to resist the colonizing epistemological strategy that would subordinate different configurations of domination under the rubric of a trans-cultural notion of patriarchy. The articulation of the law of patriarchy as a repressive and regulatory structure also requires reconsideration from this critical perspective. The feminist recourse to an imaginary past needs to be cautious not to promote a politically problematic reification of women's experience in the course of debunking the self-reifying claims of masculinist power.

The self-justification of a repressive or subordinating law almost always grounds itself in a story about what it was like *before* the advent of the law, and how it came about that the law emerged in its present and necessary form.¹ The fabrication of those origins tends to describe a state of affairs before the law that follows a necessary and unilinear narrative that culminates in, and thereby justifies, the constitution of the law. The story of origins is thus a strategic tactic within a narrative that, by telling a single, authoritative account about an irrecoverable past, makes the constitution of the law appear as a historical inevitability.

Some feminists have found in the prejuridical past traces of a utopian future, a potential resource for subversion or insurrection that promises to lead to the destruction of the law and the instatement of a new order. But if the imaginary "before" is inevitably figured within the terms of a prehistorical narrative that serves to legitimate the present state of the law or, alternatively, the imaginary future beyond the law, then this "before" is always already imbued with the self-justificatory fabrications of present and future interests, whether feminist or antifeminist. The postulation of the "before" within feminist theory becomes politically problematic when it constrains the future to materialize an idealized notion of the past or when it supports, even inadvertently, the reification of a precultural sphere of the authentic feminine. This recourse to an original or genuine femininity is a nostal-

gic and parochial ideal that refuses the contemporary demand to formulate an account of gender as a complex cultural construction. This ideal tends not only to serve culturally conservative aims, but to constitute an exclusionary practice within feminism, precipitating precisely the kind of fragmentation that the ideal purports to overcome.

Throughout the speculation of Engels, socialist feminism, those feminist positions rooted in structuralist anthropology, there emerge various efforts to locate moments or structures within history or culture that establish gender hierarchy. The isolation of such structures or key periods is pursued in order to repudiate those reactionary theories which would naturalize or universalize the subordination of women. As significant efforts to provide a critical displacement of the universalizing gestures of oppression, these theories constitute part of the contemporary theoretical field in which a further contestation of oppression is taking place. The question needs to be pursued, however, whether these powerful critiques of gender hierarchy make use of pre-suppositional fictions that entail problematic normative ideals.

Lévi-Strauss's structuralist anthropology, including the problematic nature/culture distinction, has been appropriated by some feminist theorists to support and elucidate the sex/gender distinction: the position that there is a natural or biological female who is subsequently transformed into a socially subordinate "woman," with the consequence that "sex" is to nature or "the raw" as gender is to culture or "the cooked." If Lévi-Strauss's framework were true, it would be possible to trace the transformation of sex into gender by locating that stable mechanism of cultures, the exchange rules of kinship, which effect that transformation in fairly regular ways. Within such a view, "sex" is before the law in the sense that it is culturally and political undetermined, providing the "raw material" of culture, as it were, that begins to signify only through and after its subjection to the rules of kinship.

This very concept of sex-as-matter, sex-as-instrument-of-cultural-signification, however, is a discursive formation that acts as a naturalized foundation for the nature/culture distinction and the strategies of

Gender Trouble

domination that that distinction supports. The binary relation between culture and nature promotes a relationship of hierarchy in which culture freely “imposes” meaning on nature, and, hence, renders it into an “Other” to be appropriated to its own limitless uses, safeguarding the ideality of the signifier and the structure of signification on the model of domination.

Anthropologists Marilyn Strathern and Carol MacCormack have argued that nature/culture discourse regularly figures nature as female, in need of subordination by a culture that is invariably figured as male, active, and abstract.² As in the existential dialectic of misogyny, this is yet another instance in which reason and mind are associated with masculinity and agency, while the body and nature are considered to be the mute facticity of the feminine, awaiting signification from an opposing masculine subject. As in that misogynist dialectic, materiality and meaning are mutually exclusive terms. The sexual politics that construct and maintain this distinction are effectively concealed by the discursive production of a nature and, indeed, a natural sex that postures as the unquestioned foundation of culture. Critics of structuralism such as Clifford Geertz have argued that its universalizing framework discounts the multiplicity of cultural configurations of “nature.” The analysis that assumes nature to be singular and prediscursive cannot ask, what qualifies as “nature” within a given cultural context, and for what purposes? Is the dualism necessary at all? How are the sex/gender and nature/culture dualisms constructed and naturalized in and through one another? What gender hierarchies do they serve, and what relations of subordination do they reify? If the very designation of sex is political, then “sex,” that designation supposed to be most in the raw, proves to be always already “cooked,” and the central distinctions of structuralist anthropology appear to collapse.³

The effort to locate a sexed nature before the law seems to be rooted understandably in the more fundamental project to be able to think that the patriarchal law is not universally true and all-determining. Indeed, if constructed gender is all there is, then there appears to be

no “outside,” no epistemic anchor in a precultural “before” that might serve as an alternative epistemic point of departure for a critical assessment of existing gender relations. Locating the mechanism whereby sex is transformed into gender is meant to establish not only the constructedness of gender, its unnatural and nonnecessary status, but the cultural universality of oppression in nonbiologicistic terms. How is this mechanism formulated? Can it be found or merely imagined? Is the designation of its ostensible universality any less of a reification than the position that grounds universal oppression in biology?

Only when the mechanism of gender construction implies the *contingency* of that construction does “constructedness” *per se* prove useful to the political project to enlarge the scope of possible gender configurations. If, however, it is a life of the body beyond the law or a recovery of the body before the law which then emerges as the normative goal of feminist theory, such a norm effectively takes the focus of feminist theory away from the concrete terms of contemporary cultural struggle. Indeed, the following sections on psychoanalysis, structuralism, and the status and power of their gender-instituting prohibitions centers precisely on this notion of the law: What is its ontological status—is it juridical, oppressive, and reductive in its workings, or does it inadvertently create the possibility of its own cultural displacement? To what extent does the articulation of a body prior to articulation performatively contradict itself and spawn alternatives in its place?

I. STRUCTURALISM’S CRITICAL EXCHANGE

Structuralist discourse tends to refer to the Law in the singular, in accord with Lévi-Strauss’s contention that there is a universal structure of regulating exchange that characterizes all systems of kinship. According to *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, the object of exchange that both consolidates and differentiates kinship relations is *women*, given as gifts from one patrilineal clan to another through the institution of marriage.⁴ The bride, the gift, the object of exchange constitutes “a sign and a value” that opens a channel of exchange that not only

Gender Trouble

serves the *functional* purpose of facilitating trade but performs the *symbolic* or *ritualistic* purpose of consolidating the internal bonds, the collective identity, of each clan differentiated through the act.⁵ In other words, the bride functions as a relational term between groups of men; she does not *have* an identity, and neither does she exchange one identity for another. She *reflects* masculine identity precisely through being the site of its absence. Clan members, invariably male, invoke the prerogative of identity through marriage, a repeated act of symbolic differentiation. Exogamy distinguishes and binds patronymically specific kinds of men. Patrilineality is secured through the ritualistic expulsion of women and, reciprocally, the ritualistic importation of women. As wives, women not only secure the reproduction of the *name* (the functional purpose), but effect a symbolic intercourse between clans of men. As the site of a patronymic exchange, women are and are not the patronymic sign, excluded from the signifier, the very patronym they bear. The woman in marriage qualifies not as an identity, but only as a relational term that both distinguishes and binds the various clans to a common but internally differentiated patrilineal identity.

The structural systematicity of Lévi-Strauss's explanation of kinship relations appeals to a universal logic that appears to structure human relations. Although Lévi-Strauss reports in *Tristes tropiques* that he left philosophy because anthropology provided a more concrete cultural texture to the analysis of human life, he nevertheless assimilates that cultural texture to a totalizing logical structure that effectively returns his analyses to the decontextualized philosophical structures he purported to leave. Although a number of questions can be raised about the presumptions of universality in Lévi-Strauss's work (as they are in anthropologist Clifford Geertz's *Local Knowledge*), the questions here concern the place of identitarian assumptions in this universal logic and the relationship of that identitarian logic to the subordinate status of women within the cultural reality that this logic describes. If the symbolic nature of exchange is its universally human character as well, and if that universal structure distributes "identity"

to male persons and a subordinate and relational “negation” or “lack” to women, then this logic might well be contested by a position or set of positions excluded from its very terms. What might an alternative logic of kinship be like? To what extent do identitarian logical systems always require the construction of socially impossible identities to occupy an unnamed, excluded, but presuppositional relation subsequently concealed by the logic itself? Here the impetus for Irigaray’s marking off of the phallogocentric economy becomes clear, as does a major poststructuralist impulse within feminism that questions whether an effective critique of phallogocentrism requires a displacement of the Symbolic as defined by Lévi-Strauss.

The *totality* and *closure* of language is both presumed and contested within structuralism. Although Saussure understands the relationship of signifier and signified to be arbitrary, he places this arbitrary relation within a necessarily complete linguistic system. All linguistic terms presuppose a linguistic totality of structures, the entirety of which is presupposed and implicitly recalled for any one term to bear meaning. This quasi-Leibnizian view, in which language figures as a systematic totality, effectively suppresses the moment of difference between signifier and signified, relating and unifying that moment of arbitrariness within a totalizing field. The poststructuralist break with Saussure and with the identitarian structures of exchange found in Lévi-Strauss refutes the claims of totality and universality and the presumption of binary structural oppositions that implicitly operate to quell the insistent ambiguity and openness of linguistic and cultural signification.⁶ As a result, the discrepancy between signifier and signified becomes the operative and limitless *différance* of language, rendering all referentiality into a potentially limitless displacement.

For Lévi-Strauss, the masculine cultural identity is established through an overt act of differentiation between patrilineal clans, where the “difference” in this relation is Hegelian—that is, one which simultaneously distinguishes and binds. But the “difference” established between men and the women who effect the differentiation between

men eludes the dialectic altogether. In other words, the differentiating moment of social exchange appears to be a social bond between men, a Hegelian unity between masculine terms that are simultaneously specified and individualized.⁷ On an abstract level, this is an identity-in-difference, since both clans retain a similar identity: male, patriarchal, and patrilineal. Bearing different names, they particularize themselves within this all-encompassing masculine cultural identity. But what relation instates women as the object of exchange, clothed first in one patronym and then another? What kind of differentiating mechanism distributes gender functions in this way? What kind of differentiating *différance* is presupposed and excluded by the explicit, male-mediating negation of Lévi-Strauss's Hegelian economy? As Irigaray argues, this phallogocentric economy depends essentially on an economy of *différance* that is never manifest, but always both presupposed and disavowed. In effect, the relations among patrilineal clans are based in homosocial desire (what Irigaray punningly calls "hommo-sexuality"),⁸ a repressed and, hence, disparaged sexuality, a relationship between men which is, finally, about the bonds of men, but which takes place through the heterosexual exchange and distribution of women.⁹

In a passage that reveals the homoerotic unconscious of the phallogocentric economy, Lévi-Strauss offers the link between the incest taboo and the consolidation of homoerotic bonds:

Exchange—and consequently the rule of exogamy—is not simply that of goods exchanged. Exchange—and consequently the rule of exogamy that expresses it—has in itself a social value. It provides the means of binding men together.

The taboo generates exogamic heterosexuality which Lévi-Strauss understands as the artificial accomplishment of a nonincestuous heterosexuality extracted through prohibition from a more natural and unconstrained sexuality (an assumption shared by Freud in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*).

The relation of reciprocity established between men, however, is the condition of a relation of radical nonreciprocity between men and women and a relation, as it were, of nonrelation between women. Lévi-Strauss's notorious claim that "the emergence of symbolic thought must have required that women, like words, should be things that were exchanged," suggests a necessity that Lévi-Strauss himself induces from the presumed universal structures of culture from the retrospective position of a transparent observer. But the "must have" appears as an inference only to function as a performative; since the moment in which the symbolic emerged could not be one that Lévi-Strauss witnessed, he conjectures a necessary history: The report thereby becomes an injunction. His analysis prompted Irigaray to reflect on what would happen if "the goods got together" and revealed the unanticipated agency of an alternative sexual economy. Her recent work, *Sexes et parentés*,¹⁰ offers a critical exegesis of how this construction of reciprocal exchange between men presupposes a nonreciprocity between the sexes inarticulable within that economy, as well as the unnameability of the female, the feminine, and lesbian sexuality.

If there is a sexual domain that is *excluded* from the Symbolic and can potentially expose the Symbolic as hegemonic rather than totalizing in its reach, it must then be possible to locate this excluded domain either within or outside that economy and to strategize its intervention in terms of that placement. The following rereading of the structuralist law and the narrative that accounts for the production of sexual difference within its terms centers on the presumed fixity and universality of that law and, through a genealogical critique, seeks to expose that law's powers of inadvertent and self-defeating generativity. Does "the Law" produce these positions unilaterally or invariably? Can it produce configurations of sexuality that effectively contest the law itself, or are those contests inevitably phantasmatic? Can the *generativity* of that law be specified as variable or even subversive?

The law forbidding incest is the locus of this economy of kinship that forbids endogamy. Lévi-Strauss maintains that the centrality of the

incest taboo establishes the significant nexus between structuralist anthropology and psychoanalysis. Although Lévi-Strauss acknowledges that Freud's *Totem and Taboo* has been discredited on empirical grounds, he considers that repudiating gesture as paradoxical evidence in support of Freud's thesis. Incest, for Lévi-Strauss, is not a social fact, but a pervasive cultural fantasy. Presuming the heterosexual masculinity of the subject of desire, Lévi-Strauss maintains that "the desire for the mother or the sister, the murder of the father and the sons' repentance undoubtedly do not correspond to any fact or group of facts occupying a given place in history. But perhaps they symbolically express an ancient and lasting dream."¹¹

In an effort to affirm the psychoanalytic insight into unconscious incestuous fantasy, Lévi-Strauss refers to the "magic of this dream, its power to mould men's thoughts unbeknown to them . . . the acts it evokes have never been committed, because culture opposes them at all times and all places."¹² This rather astonishing statement provides insight not only into Lévi-Strauss's apparent powers of denial (acts of incest "have never been committed"!), but the central difficulty with assuming the efficacy of that prohibition. That the prohibition exists in no way suggests that it works. Rather, its existence appears to suggest that desires, actions, indeed, pervasive social practices of incest are generated precisely in virtue of the eroticization of that taboo. That incestuous desires are phantasmatic in no way implies that they are not also "social facts." The question is, rather, how do such phantasms become generated and, indeed, instituted as a consequence of their prohibition? Further, how does the social conviction, here symptomatically articulated through Lévi-Strauss, that the prohibition *is* efficacious disavow and, hence, clear a social space in which incestuous practices are free to reproduce themselves without proscription?

For Lévi-Strauss, the taboo against the act of heterosexual incest between son and mother as well as that incestuous fantasy are instated as universal truths of culture. How is incestuous heterosexuality constituted as the ostensibly natural and pre-artificial matrix for desire,

and how is desire established as a heterosexual male prerogative? The naturalization of both heterosexuality and masculine sexual agency are discursive constructions nowhere accounted for but everywhere assumed within this founding structuralist frame.

The Lacanian appropriation of Lévi-Strauss focuses on the prohibition against incest and the rule of exogamy in the reproduction of culture, where culture is understood primarily as a set of linguistic structures and significations. For Lacan, the Law which forbids the incestuous union between boy and mother initiates the structures of kinship, a series of highly regulated libidinal displacements that take place through language. Although the structures of language, collectively understood as the Symbolic, maintain an ontological integrity apart from the various speaking agents through whom they work, the Law reasserts and individuates itself within the terms of every infantile entrance into culture. Speech emerges only upon the condition of dissatisfaction, where dissatisfaction is instituted through incestuous prohibition; the original *jouissance* is lost through the primary repression that founds the subject. In its place emerges the sign which is similarly barred from the signifier and which seeks in what it signifies a recovery of that irrecoverable pleasure. Founded through that prohibition, the subject speaks only to displace desire onto the metonymic substitutions for that irretrievable pleasure. Language is the residue and alternative accomplishment of dissatisfied desire, the variegated cultural production of a sublimation that never really satisfies. That language inevitably fails to signify is the necessary consequence of the prohibition which grounds the possibility of language and marks the vanity of its referential gestures.

II. LACAN, RIVIERE, AND THE STRATEGIES OF MASQUERADE

To ask after the “being” of gender and/or sex in Lacanian terms is to confound the very purpose of Lacan’s theory of language. Lacan disputes the primacy given to ontology within the terms of Western metaphysics and insists upon the subordination of the question

“What is/has being?” to the prior question “How is ‘being’ instituted and allocated through the signifying practices of the paternal economy?” The ontological specification of being, negation, and their relations is understood to be determined by a language structured by the paternal law and its mechanisms of differentiation. A thing takes on the characterization of “being” and becomes mobilized by that ontological gesture only within a structure of signification that, as the Symbolic, is itself pre-ontological.

There is no inquiry, then, into ontology *per se*, no access to being, without a prior inquiry into the “being” of the Phallus, the authorizing signification of the Law that takes sexual difference as a presupposition of its own intelligibility. “Being” the Phallus and “having” the Phallus denote divergent sexual positions, or nonpositions (impossible positions, really), within language. To “be” the Phallus is to be the “signifier” of the desire of the Other and to *appear* as this signifier. In other words, it is to be the object, the Other of a (heterosexualized) masculine desire, but also to represent or reflect that desire. This is an Other that constitutes, not the limit of masculinity in a feminine alterity, but the site of a masculine self-elaboration. For women to “be” the Phallus means, then, to reflect the power of the Phallus, to signify that power, to “embody” the Phallus, to supply the site to which it penetrates, and to signify the Phallus through “being” its Other, its absence, its lack, the dialectical confirmation of its identity. By claiming that the Other that lacks the Phallus is the one who *is* the Phallus, Lacan clearly suggests that power is wielded by this feminine position of not-having, that the masculine subject who “has” the Phallus requires this Other to confirm and, hence, be the Phallus in its “extended” sense.¹³

This ontological characterization presupposes that the appearance or effect of being is always produced through the structures of signification. The Symbolic order creates cultural intelligibility through the mutually exclusive positions of “having” the Phallus (the position of men) and “being” the Phallus (the paradoxical position of women). The interdependency of these positions recalls the Hegelian structure of

failed reciprocity between master and slave, in particular, the unexpected dependency of the master on the slave in order to establish his own identity through reflection.¹⁴ Lacan casts that drama, however, in a phantasmatic domain. Every effort to establish identity within the terms of this binary disjunction of “being” and “having” returns to the inevitable “lack” and “loss” that ground their phantasmatic construction and mark the incommensurability of the Symbolic and the real.

If the Symbolic is understood as a culturally universal structure of signification that is nowhere fully instantiated in the real, it makes sense to ask: What or who is it that signifies what or whom in this ostensibly crosscultural affair? This question, however, is posed within a frame that presupposes a subject as signifier and an object as signified, the traditional epistemological dichotomy within philosophy prior to the structuralist displacement of the subject. Lacan calls into question this scheme of signification. He poses the relation between the sexes in terms that reveal the speaking “I” as a masculinized effect of repression, one which postures as an autonomous and self-grounding subject, but whose very coherence is called into question by the sexual positions that it excludes in the process of identity formation. For Lacan, the subject comes into being—that is, begins to posture as a self-grounding signifier within language—only on the condition of a primary repression of the pre-individuated incestuous pleasures associated with the (now repressed) maternal body.

The masculine subject only *appears* to originate meanings and thereby to signify. His seemingly self-grounded autonomy attempts to conceal the repression which is both its ground and the perpetual possibility of its own ungrounding. But that process of meaning-constitution requires that women reflect that masculine power and everywhere reassure that power of the reality of its illusory autonomy. This task is confounded, to say the least, when the demand that women reflect the autonomous power of masculine subject/signifier becomes essential to the construction of that autonomy and, thus, becomes the basis of a radical dependency that effectively undercuts the function it

Gender Trouble

serves. But further, this dependency, although denied, is also *pursued* by the masculine subject, for the woman as reassuring sign is the displaced maternal body, the vain but persistent promise of the recovery of pre-individuated *jouissance*. The conflict of masculinity appears, then, to be precisely the demand for a full recognition of autonomy that will also and nevertheless promise a return to those full pleasures prior to repression and individuation.

Women are said to “be” the Phallus in the sense that they maintain the power to reflect or represent the “reality” of the self-grounding postures of the masculine subject, a power which, if withdrawn, would break up the foundational illusions of the masculine subject position. In order to “be” the Phallus, the reflector and guarantor of an apparent masculine subject position, women must become, must “be” (in the sense of “posture as if they were”) precisely what men are not and, in their very lack, establish the essential function of men. Hence, “being” the Phallus is always a “being for” a masculine subject who seeks to reconfirm and augment his identity through the recognition of that “being for.” In a strong sense, Lacan disputes the notion that *men* signify the meaning of *women* or that *women* signify the meaning of *men*. The division and exchange between this “being” and “having” the Phallus is established by the Symbolic, the paternal law. Part of the comedic dimension of this failed model of reciprocity, of course, is that both masculine and feminine positions are signified, the signifier belonging to the Symbolic that can never be assumed in more than token form by either position.

To *be* the Phallus is to be signified by the paternal law, to be both its object and its instrument and, in structuralist terms, the “sign” and promise of its power. Hence, as the constituted or signified object of exchange through which the paternal law extends its power and the mode in which it appears, women are said to be the Phallus, that is, the emblem of its continuing circulation. But this “being” the Phallus is necessarily dissatisfying to the extent that women can never fully reflect that law; some feminists argue that it requires a renunciation of

women's own desire (a double renunciation, in fact, corresponding to the "double wave" of repression that Freud claimed founds femininity),¹⁵ which is the expropriation of that desire as the desire to be nothing other than a reflection, a guarantor of the pervasive necessity of the Phallus.

On the other hand, men are said to "have" the Phallus, yet never to "be" it, in the sense that the penis is not equivalent to that Law and can never fully symbolize that Law. Hence, there is a necessary or presuppositional impossibility to any effort to occupy the position of "having" the Phallus, with the consequence that both positions of "having" and "being" are, in Lacan's terms, finally to be understood as comedic failures that are nevertheless compelled to articulate and enact these repeated impossibilities.

But how does a woman "appear" to be the Phallus, the lack that embodies and affirms the Phallus? According to Lacan, this is done through masquerade, the effect of a melancholy that is essential to the feminine position as such. In his early essay, "The Meaning of the Phallus," he writes of "the relations between the sexes":

Let us say that these relations will revolve around a being and a having which, because they refer to a signifier, the phallus, have the contradictory effect of on the one hand lending reality to the subject in that signifier, and on the other making unreal the relations to be signified.¹⁶

In the lines that directly follow this sentence, Lacan appears to refer to the appearance of the "reality" of the masculine subject as well as to the "unreality" of heterosexuality. He also appears to refer to the position of women (my interruption is within brackets): "This follows from the intervention of an 'appearing' which gets substituted for the 'having' [a substitution is required, no doubt, because women are said not "to have"] so as to protect it on one side and to mask its lack on the other." Although there is no grammatical gender here, it seems that Lacan is describing the position of women for whom "lack" is

characteristic and, hence, in need of masking and who are in some unspecified sense in need of protection. Lacan then states that this situation produces “the effect that the ideal or typical manifestations of behaviour in both sexes, up to and including the act of sexual copulation, are entirely propelled into comedy” (84).

Lacan continues this exposition of heterosexual comedy by explaining that this “appearing as being” the Phallus that women are compelled to do is inevitably *masquerade*. The term is significant because it suggests contradictory meanings: On the one hand, if the “being,” the ontological specification of the Phallus, is masquerade, then it would appear to reduce all being to a form of appearing, the appearance of being, with the consequence that all gender ontology is reducible to the play of appearances. On the other hand, masquerade suggests that there is a “being” or ontological specification of femininity *prior to* the masquerade, a feminine desire or demand that is masked and capable of disclosure, that, indeed, might promise an eventual disruption and displacement of the phallogocentric signifying economy.

At least two very different tasks can be discerned from the ambiguous structure of Lacan’s analysis. On the one hand, masquerade may be understood as the performative production of a sexual ontology, an appearing that makes itself convincing as a “being”; on the other hand, masquerade can be read as a denial of a feminine desire that presupposes some prior ontological femininity regularly unrepresented by the phallic economy. Irigaray remarks in such a vein that “the masquerade . . . is what women do . . . in order to participate in man’s desire, but at the cost of giving up their own.”¹⁷ The former task would engage a critical reflection on gender ontology as parodic (de)construction and, perhaps, pursue the mobile possibilities of the slippery distinction between “appearing” and “being,” a radicalization of the “comedic” dimension of sexual ontology only partially pursued by Lacan. The latter would initiate feminist strategies of unmasking in order to recover or release whatever feminine desire has remained suppressed within the terms of the phallic economy.¹⁸

Perhaps these alternative directions are not as mutually exclusive as they appear, since appearances become more suspect all the time. Reflections on the meaning of masquerade in Lacan as well as in Joan Riviere's "Womanliness as a Masquerade" have differed greatly in their interpretations of what precisely is masked by masquerade. Is masquerade the consequence of a feminine desire that must be negated and, thus, made into a lack that, nevertheless, must appear in some way? Is masquerade the consequence of a denial of this lack for the purpose of appearing to be the Phallus? Does masquerade construct femininity as the reflection of the Phallus in order to disguise bisexual possibilities that otherwise might disrupt the seamless construction of a heterosexualized femininity? Does masquerade, as Riviere suggests, transform aggression and the fear of reprisal into seduction and flirtation? Does it serve primarily to conceal or repress a pre-given femininity, a feminine desire which would establish an insubordinate alterity to the masculine subject and expose the necessary failure of masculinity? Or is masquerade the means by which femininity itself is *first* established, the exclusionary practice of identity formation in which the masculine is effectively excluded and instated as outside the boundaries of a feminine gendered position?

Lacan continues the quotation cited above:

Paradoxical as this formulation might seem, it is in order to be the phallus, that is, the signifier of the desire of the Other, that the woman will reject an essential part of her femininity, notably all its attributes through masquerade. It is for what she is not that she expects to be desired as well as loved. But she finds the signifier of her own desire in the body of the one to whom she addresses her demand for love. Certainly we should not forget that the organ invested with this signifying function takes on the value of a fetish. (84)

If this unnamed "organ," presumably the penis (treated like the Hebraic *Yahweh*, never to be spoken), is a fetish, why should it be that we might so easily forget it, as Lacan himself assumes? And what is the "essential

part of her femininity” that must be rejected? Is it the, again, unnamed part which, once rejected, appears as a lack? Or is it the lack itself that must be rejected, so that she might appear as the Phallus itself? Is the unnameability of this “essential part” the same unnameability that attends the male “organ” that we are always in danger of forgetting? Is this precisely that forgetfulness that constitutes the repression at the core of feminine masquerade? Is it a presumed masculinity that must be forfeited in order to appear as the lack that confirms and, therefore, is the Phallus, or is it a phallic possibility, that must be negated in order to be that lack that confirms?

Lacan clarifies his own position as he remarks that “the function of the mask . . . dominates the identifications through which refusals of love are resolved” (85). In other words, the mask is part of the incorporative strategy of melancholy, the taking on of attributes of the object/Other that is lost, where loss is the consequence of a refusal of love.¹⁹ That the mask “dominates” as well as “resolves” these refusals suggests that appropriation is the strategy through which those refusals are themselves refused, a double negation that redoubles the structure of identity through the melancholic absorption of the one who is, in effect, twice lost.

Significantly, Lacan locates the discussion of the mask in conjunction with an account of female homosexuality. He claims that “the orientation of feminine homosexuality, as observation shows, follows from a disappointment which reenforces the side of the demand for love” (85). Who is observing and what is being observed are conveniently elided here, but Lacan takes his commentary to be obvious to anyone who cares to look. What one sees through “observation” is the founding disappointment of the female homosexual, where this disappointment recalls the refusals that are dominated/resolved through masquerade. One also “observes” somehow that the female homosexual is subject to a strengthened idealization, a demand for love that is pursued at the expense of desire.

Lacan continues this paragraph on “feminine homosexuality” with

the statement partially quoted above: "These remarks should be qualified by going back to the function of the mask [which is] to dominate the identifications through which refusals of love are resolved," and if female homosexuality is understood as a *consequence* of a disappointment "as observation shows," then this disappointment must appear, and appear clearly, in order to be observed. If Lacan presumes that female homosexuality issues from a disappointed heterosexuality, as observation is said to show, could it not be equally clear to the observer that heterosexuality issues from a disappointed homosexuality? Is it the mask of the female homosexual that is "observed," and if so, what clearly readable expression gives evidence of that "disappointment" and that "orientation" as well as the displacement of desire by the (idealized) demand for love? Lacan is perhaps suggesting that what is clear to observation is the desexualized status of the lesbian, the incorporation of a refusal that appears as the absence of desire.²⁰ But we can understand this conclusion to be the necessary result of a heterosexualized and masculine observational point of view that takes lesbian sexuality to be a refusal of sexuality *per se* only because sexuality is presumed to be heterosexual, and the observer, here constructed as the heterosexual male, is clearly being refused. Indeed, is this account not the consequence of a refusal that disappoints the observer, and whose disappointment, disavowed and projected, is made into the essential character of the women who effectively refuse him?

In a characteristic gliding over pronominal locations, Lacan fails to make clear who refuses whom. As readers, we are meant, however, to understand that this free-floating "refusal" is linked in a significant way to the mask. If every refusal is, finally, a loyalty to some other bond in the present or the past, refusal is simultaneously preservation as well. The mask thus conceals this loss, but preserves (and negates) this loss through its concealment. The mask has a double function which is the double function of melancholy. The mask is taken on through the process of incorporation which is a way of inscribing and then wearing a melancholic identification in and on the body; in effect, it is

the signification of the body in the mold of the Other who has been refused. Dominated through appropriation, every refusal fails, and the refuser becomes part of the very identity of the refused, indeed, becomes the psychic refuse of the refused. The loss of the object is never absolute because it is redistributed within a psychic/corporeal boundary that expands to incorporate that loss. This locates the process of gender incorporation within the wider orbit of melancholy.

Published in 1929, Joan Riviere's essay, "Womanliness as a Masquerade,"²¹ introduces the notion of femininity as masquerade in terms of a theory of aggression and conflict resolution. This theory appears at first to be far afield from Lacan's analysis of masquerade in terms of the comedy of sexual positions. She begins with a respectful review of Ernest Jones's typology of the development of female sexuality into heterosexual and homosexual forms. She focuses, however, on the "intermediate types" that blur the boundaries between the heterosexual and the homosexual and, implicitly, contest the descriptive capacity of Jones's classificatory system. In a remark that resonates with Lacan's facile reference to "observation," Riviere seeks recourse to mundane perception or experience to validate her focus on these "intermediate types": "In daily life types of men and women are constantly met with who, while mainly heterosexual in their development, plainly display strong features of the other sex" (35). What is here most plain is the classifications that condition and structure the perception of this mix of attributes. Clearly, Riviere begins with set notions about what it is to display characteristics of one's sex, and how it is that those plain characteristics are understood to express or reflect an ostensible sexual orientation.²² This perception or observation not only assumes a correlation among characteristics, desires, and "orientations,"²³ but creates that unity through the perceptual act itself. Riviere's postulated unity between gender attributes and a naturalized "orientation" appears as an instance of what Wittig refers to as the "imaginary formation" of sex.

And yet, Riviere calls into question these naturalized typologies through an appeal to a psychoanalytic account that locates the meaning

of mixed gender attributes in the “interplay of conflicts” (35). Significantly, she contrasts this kind of psychoanalytic theory with one that would reduce the presence of ostensibly “masculine” attributes in a woman to a “radical or fundamental tendency.” In other words, the acquisition of such attributes and the accomplishment of a heterosexual or homosexual orientation are produced through the resolution of conflicts that have as their aim the suppression of anxiety. Citing Ferenczi in order to establish an analogy with her own account, Riviere writes:

Ferenczi pointed out . . . that homosexual men exaggerate their heterosexuality as a ‘defence’ against their homosexuality. I shall attempt to show that women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men. (35)

It is unclear what is the “exaggerated” form of heterosexuality the homosexual man is alleged to display, but the phenomenon under notice here might simply be that gay men simply may not look much different from their heterosexual counterparts. This lack of an overt differentiating style or appearance may be diagnosed as a symptomatic “defense” only because the gay man in question does not conform to the idea of the homosexual that the analyst has drawn and sustained from cultural stereotypes. A Lacanian analysis might argue that the supposed “exaggeration” in the homosexual man of whatever attributes count as apparent heterosexuality is the attempt to “have” the Phallus, the subject position that entails an active and heterosexualized desire. Similarly, the “mask” of the “women who wish for masculinity” can be interpreted as an effort to renounce the “having” of the Phallus in order to avert retribution by those from whom it must have been procured through castration. Riviere explains the fear of retribution as the consequence of a woman’s fantasy to take the place of men, more precisely, of the father. In the case that she herself examines, which some consider to be autobiographical, the rivalry with the father is not over

Gender Trouble

the desire of the mother, as one might expect, but over the place of the father in public discourse as speaker, lecturer, writer—that is, as a user of signs rather than a sign-object, an item of exchange. This castrating desire might be understood as the desire to relinquish the status of woman-as-sign in order to appear as a subject within language.

Indeed, the analogy that Riviere draws between the homosexual man and the masked woman is not, in her view, an analogy between male and female homosexuality. Femininity is taken on by a woman who “wishes for masculinity,” but fears the retributive consequences of taking on the public appearance of masculinity. Masculinity is taken on by the male homosexual who, presumably, seeks to hide—not from others, but from himself—an ostensible femininity. The woman takes on a masquerade knowingly in order to conceal her masculinity from the masculine audience she wants to castrate. But the homosexual man is said to exaggerate his “heterosexuality” (meaning a masculinity that allows him to pass as heterosexual?) as a “defense,” unknowingly, because he cannot acknowledge his own homosexuality (or is it that the analyst would not acknowledge it, if it were his?). In other words, the homosexual man takes unconscious retribution on himself, both desiring and fearing the consequences of castration. The male homosexual does not “know” his homosexuality, although Ferenczi and Riviere apparently do.

But does Riviere know the homosexuality of the woman in masquerade that she describes? When it comes to the counterpart of the analogy that she herself sets up, the woman who “wishes for masculinity” is homosexual only in terms of sustaining a masculine identification, but not in terms of a sexual orientation or desire. Invoking Jones’s typology once again, as if it were a phallic shield, she formulates a “defense” that designates as asexual a class of female homosexuals understood as the masquerading type: “his first group of homosexual women who, while taking no interest in other women, wish for ‘recognition’ of their masculinity from men and claim to be the equals of men, or in other words, to be men themselves” (37). As in Lacan, the lesbian is

here signified as an asexual position, as indeed, a position that refuses sexuality. For the earlier analogy with Ferenzci to become complete, it would seem that this description enacts the “defense” against female homosexuality *as sexuality* that is nevertheless understood as the reflexive structure of the “homosexual man.” And yet, there is no clear way to read this description of a female homosexuality that is not about a sexual desire for women. Riviere would have us believe that this curious typological anomaly cannot be reduced to a repressed female homosexuality or heterosexuality. What is hidden is not sexuality, but rage.

One possible interpretation is that the woman in masquerade wishes for masculinity in order to engage in public discourse with men and as a man as part of a male homoerotic exchange. And precisely because that male homoerotic exchange would signify castration, she fears the same retribution that motivates the “defenses” of the homosexual man. Indeed, perhaps femininity as masquerade is meant to deflect from male homosexuality—that being the erotic presupposition of hegemonic discourse, the “hommo-sexuality” that Irigaray suggests. In any case, Riviere would have us consider that such women sustain masculine identifications not to occupy a position in a sexual exchange, but, rather, to pursue a rivalry that has no sexual object or, at least, that has none that she will name.

Riviere’s text offers a way to reconsider the question: What is masked by masquerade? In a key passage that marks a departure from the restricted analysis demarcated by Jones’s classificatory system, she suggests that “masquerade” is more than the characteristic of an “intermediate type,” that it is central to all “womanliness”:

The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the ‘masquerade’. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing. (38)

This refusal to postulate a femininity that is prior to mimicry and the mask is taken up by Stephen Heath in “Joan Riviere and the

Masquerade” as evidence for the notion that “authentic womanliness is such a mimicry, *is* the masquerade.” Relying on the postulated characterization of libido as masculine, Heath concludes that femininity is the denial of that libido, the “dissimulation of a fundamental masculinity.”²⁴

Femininity becomes a mask that dominates/resolves a masculine identification, for a masculine identification would, within the presumed heterosexual matrix of desire, produce a desire for a female object, the Phallus; hence, the donning of femininity as mask may reveal a refusal of a female homosexuality and, at the same time, the hyperbolic incorporation of that female Other who is refused—an odd form of preserving and protecting that love within the circle of the melancholic and negative narcissism that results from the psychic inculcation of compulsory heterosexuality.

One might read Riviere as fearful of her own phallicism²⁵—that is, of the phallic identity she risks exposing in the course of her lecture, her writing, indeed, the writing of this phallicism that the essay itself both conceals and enacts. It may, however, be less her own masculine identity than the masculine heterosexual desire that is its signature that she seeks both to deny and enact by becoming the object she forbids herself to love. This is the predicament produced by a matrix that accounts for all desire for women by subjects of whatever sex or gender as originating in a masculine, heterosexual position. The libido-as-masculine is the source from which all possible sexuality is presumed to come.²⁶

Here the typology of gender and sexuality needs to give way to a discursive account of the cultural production of gender. If Riviere’s analysand is a homosexual without homosexuality, that may be because that option is already refused her; the cultural existence of this prohibition is there in the lecture space, determining and differentiating her as speaker and her mainly male audience. Although she fears that her castrating wish might be understood, she denies that there is a contest over a common object of desire without which the masculine identification that she does acknowledge would lack its confirmation and

essential sign. Indeed, her account presupposes the primacy of aggression over sexuality, the desire to castrate and take the place of the masculine subject, a desire avowedly rooted in a rivalry, but one which, for her, exhausts itself in the act of displacement. But the question might usefully be asked: What sexual fantasy does this aggression serve, and what sexuality does it authorize? Although the right to occupy the position of a language user is the ostensible purpose of the analysand's aggression, we can ask whether there is not a repudiation of the feminine that prepares this position within speech and which, invariably, reemerges as the Phallic-Other that will phantasmatically confirm the authority of the speaking subject?

We might then rethink the very notions of masculinity and femininity constructed here as rooted in unresolved homosexual cathexes. The melancholy refusal/domination of homosexuality culminates in the incorporation of the same-sexed object of desire and reemerges in the construction of discrete sexual "natures" that require and institute their opposites through exclusion. To presume the primacy of bisexuality or the primary characterization of the libido as masculine is still not to account for the construction of these various "primacies." Some psychoanalytic accounts would argue that femininity is based in the exclusion of the masculine, where the masculine is one "part" of a bisexual psychic composition. The coexistence of the binary is assumed, and then repression and exclusion intercede to craft discretely gendered "identities" out of this binary, with the result that identity is always already inherent in a bisexual disposition that is, through repression, severed into its component parts. In a sense, the binary restriction on culture postures as the precultural bisexuality that sunders into heterosexual familiarity through its advent into "culture." From the start, however, the binary restriction on sexuality shows clearly that culture in no way postdates the bisexuality that it purports to repress: It constitutes the matrix of intelligibility through which primary bisexuality itself becomes thinkable. The "bisexuality" that is posited as a psychic foundation and is said to be repressed at a

later date is a discursive production that claims to be prior to all discourse, effected through the compulsory and generative exclusionary practices of normative heterosexuality.

Lacanian discourse centers on the notion of “a divide,” a primary or fundamental split that renders the subject internally divided and that establishes the duality of the sexes. But why this exclusive focus on the fall into twoness? Within Lacanian terms, it appears that division is always the *effect* of the law, and not a preexisting condition on which the law acts. Jacqueline Rose writes that “for both sexes, sexuality will necessarily touch on the duplicity which undermines its fundamental divide,”²⁷ suggesting that sexual division, effected through repression, is invariably undermined by the very ruse of identity. But is it not a prediscursive doubleness that comes to undermine the univocal posturing of each position within the field of sexual difference? Rose writes compellingly that “for Lacan, as we have seen, there is no prediscursive reality (‘How return, other than by means of a special discourse, to a prediscursive reality?’, SXX, p. 33), no place prior to the law which is available and can be retrieved.” As an indirect critique of Irigaray’s efforts to mark a place for feminine writing outside the phallic economy, Rose then adds, “And there is no feminine outside language.”²⁸ If prohibition creates the “fundamental divide” of sexuality, and if this “divide” is shown to be duplicitous precisely because of the artificiality of its division, then there must be a division that *resists* division, a psychic doubleness or inherent bisexuality that comes to undermine every effort of severing. To consider this psychic doubleness as the *effect* of the Law is Lacan’s stated purpose, but the point of resistance within his theory as well.

Rose is no doubt right to claim that every identification, precisely because it has a phantasm as its ideal, is bound to fail. Any psychoanalytic theory that prescribes a developmental process that presupposes the accomplishment of a given father-son or mother-daughter identification mistakenly conflates the Symbolic with the real and misses the critical point of incommensurability that exposes “identification” and the

drama of “being” and “having” the Phallus as invariably phantasmatic.²⁹ And yet, what determines the domain of the phantasmatic, the rules that regulate the incommensurability of the Symbolic with the real? It is clearly not enough to claim that this drama holds for Western, late capitalist household dwellers and that perhaps in some yet to be defined epoch some other Symbolic regime will govern the language of sexual ontology. By instituting the Symbolic as invariably phantasmatic, the “invariably” wanders into an “inevitably,” generating a description of sexuality in terms that promote cultural stasis as its result.

The rendition of Lacan that understands the prediscursive as an impossibility promises a critique that conceptualizes the Law as prohibitive and generative at once. That the language of physiology or disposition does not appear here is welcome news, but binary restrictions nevertheless still operate to frame and formulate sexuality and delimit in advance the forms of its resistance to the “real.” In marking off the very domain of what is subject to repression, exclusion operates prior to repression—that is, in the delimitation of the Law and its objects of subordination. Although one can argue that for Lacan repression creates the repressed through the prohibitive and paternal law, that argument does not account for the pervasive nostalgia for the lost fullness of *jouissance* in his work. Indeed, the loss could not be understood as loss unless the very irrecoverability of that pleasure did not designate a past that is barred from the present through the prohibitive law. That we cannot know that past from the position of the founded subject is not to say that that past does not reemerge within that subject’s speech as *fêlure*, discontinuity, metonymic slippage. As the truer noumenal reality existed for Kant, the prejudicial past of *jouissance* is unknowable from within spoken language; that does not mean, however, that this past has no reality. The very inaccessibility of the past, indicated by metonymic slippage in contemporary speech, confirms that original fullness as the ultimate reality.

The further question emerges: What plausibility can be given to an account of the Symbolic that requires a conformity to the Law that

Gender Trouble

proves impossible to perform and that makes no room for the flexibility of the Law itself, its cultural reformulation in more plastic forms? The injunction to become sexed in the ways prescribed by the Symbolic always leads to failure and, in some cases, to the exposure of the phantasmatic nature of sexual identity itself. The Symbolic's claim to be cultural intelligibility in its present and hegemonic form effectively consolidates the power of those phantasms as well as the various dramas of identificatory failures. The alternative is not to suggest that identification should become a viable accomplishment. But there does seem to be a romanticization or, indeed, a religious idealization of "failure," humility and limitation before the Law, which makes the Lacanian narrative ideologically suspect. The dialectic between a juridical imperative that cannot be fulfilled and an inevitable failure "before the law" recalls the tortured relationship between the God of the Old Testament and those humiliated servants who offer their obedience without reward. That sexuality now embodies this religious impulse in the form of the demand for love (considered to be an "absolute" demand) that is distinct from both need and desire (a kind of ecstatic transcendence that eclipses sexuality altogether) lends further credibility to the Symbolic as that which operates for human subjects as the inaccessible but all-determining deity.

This structure of religious tragedy in Lacanian theory effectively undermines any strategy of cultural politics to configure an alternative imaginary for the play of desires. If the Symbolic guarantees the failure of the tasks it commands, perhaps its purposes, like those of the Old Testament God, are altogether unteleological—not the accomplishment of some goal, but obedience and suffering to enforce the "subject's" sense of limitation "before the law." There is, of course, the comic side to this drama that is revealed through the disclosure of the permanent impossibility of the realization of identity. But even this comedy is the inverse expression of an enslavement to the God that it claims to be unable to overcome.

Lacanian theory must be understood as a kind of "slave morality."

How would Lacanian theory be reformulated after the appropriation of Nietzsche's insight in *On the Genealogy of Morals* that God, the inaccessible Symbolic, is rendered inaccessible by a power (the will-to-power) that regularly institutes its own powerlessness?³⁰ This figuration of the paternal law as the inevitable and unknowable authority before which the sexed subject is bound to fail must be read for the theological impulse that motivates it as well as for the critique of theology that points beyond it. The construction of the law that guarantees failure is symptomatic of a slave morality that disavows the very generative powers it uses to construct the "Law" as a permanent impossibility. What is the power that creates this fiction that reflects inevitable subjection? What are the cultural stakes in keeping power within that self-negating circle, and how might that power be reclaimed from the trappings of a prohibitive law that is that power in its dissimulation and self-subjection?

III. FREUD AND THE MELANCHOLIA OF GENDER

Although Irigaray maintains that the structure of femininity and melancholy "cross-check"³¹ and Kristeva identifies motherhood with melancholy in "Motherhood According to Bellini" as well as *Soleil noir: Dépression et mélancolie*,³² there has been little effort to understand the melancholic denial/preservation of homosexuality in the production of gender within the heterosexual frame. Freud isolates the mechanism of melancholia as essential to "ego formation" and "character," but only alludes to the centrality of melancholia to gender. In *The Ego and the Id* (1923), he elaborates on the structure of mourning as the incipient structure of ego formation, a thesis whose traces can be found in the 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia."³³ In the experience of losing another human being whom one has loved, Freud argues, the ego is said to incorporate that other into the very structure of the ego, taking on attributes of the other and "sustaining" the other through magical acts of imitation. The loss of the other whom one desires and loves is overcome through a specific act of identification that seeks to harbor that other

Gender Trouble

within the very structure of the self: “So by taking flight into the ego, love escapes annihilation” (178). This identification is not simply momentary or occasional, but becomes a new structure of identity; in effect, the other becomes part of the ego through the permanent internalization of the other’s attributes.³⁴ In cases in which an ambivalent relationship is severed through loss, that ambivalence becomes internalized as a self-critical or self-debasing disposition in which the role of the other is now occupied and directed by the ego itself: “The narcissistic identification with the object then becomes a substitute for the erotic cathexis, the result of which is that in spite of the conflict with the loved person the love-relation need not be given up” (170). Later, Freud makes clear that the process of internalizing and sustaining lost loves is crucial to the formation of the ego and its “object-choice.”

In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud refers to this process of internalization described in “Mourning and Melancholia” and remarks:

we succeeded in explaining the painful disorder of melancholia by supposing that [in those suffering from it] an object which was lost has been set up again inside the ego—that is, that an object-cathexis has been replaced by an identification. At that time, however, we did not appreciate the full significance of this process and did not know how common and how typical it is. Since then we have come to understand that this kind of substitution has a great share in determining the form taken by the ego and that it makes an essential contribution towards building up what is called its “character.” (18)

As this chapter on “The Ego and the Super-Ego (Ego-Ideal)” proceeds, however, it is not merely “character” that is being described, but the acquisition of gender identity as well. In claiming that “it may be that this identification is the sole condition under which the id can give up its objects,” Freud suggests that the internalizing strategy of melancholia does not *oppose* the work of mourning, but may be the only way in which the ego can survive the loss of its essential emotional ties to others. Freud goes on to claim that “the character of the ego is a precipi-

tate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object-choices” (19). This process of internalizing lost loves becomes pertinent to gender formation when we realize that the incest taboo, among other functions, initiates a loss of a love-object for the ego and that this ego recuperates from this loss through the internalization of the tabooed object of desire. In the case of a prohibited heterosexual union, it is the object which is denied, but not the modality of desire, so that the desire is deflected from that object onto other objects of the opposite sex. But in the case of a prohibited homosexual union, it is clear that both the desire and the object require renunciation and so become subject to the internalizing strategies of melancholia. Hence, “the young boy deals with his father by identifying himself with him” (21).

In the first formation of the boy-father identification, Freud speculates that the identification takes place without the prior object cathexis (21), meaning that the identification is not the consequence of a love lost or prohibited of the son for the father. Later, however, Freud does postulate primary bisexuality as a complicating factor in the process of character and gender formation. With the postulation of a bisexual set of libidinal dispositions, there is no reason to deny an original sexual love of the son for the father, and yet Freud implicitly does. The boy does, however, sustain a primary cathexis for the mother, and Freud remarks that bisexuality there makes itself known in the masculine and feminine behavior with which the boy-child attempts to seduce the mother.

Although Freud introduces the Oedipal complex to explain why the boy must repudiate the mother and adopt an ambivalent attitude toward the father, he remarks shortly afterward that, “It may even be that the ambivalence displayed in the relations to the parents should be attributed entirely to bisexuality and that it is not, as I have represented above, developed out of identification in consequence of rivalry” (23, n.1). But what would condition the ambivalence in such a case? Clearly, Freud means to suggest that the boy must choose not only between the

two object choices, but the two sexual dispositions, masculine and feminine. That the boy usually chooses the heterosexual would, then, be the result, not of the fear of castration by the father, but of the fear of castration—that is, the fear of “feminization” associated within heterosexual cultures with male homosexuality. In effect, it is not primarily the heterosexual lust for the mother that must be punished and sublimated, but the homosexual cathexis that must be subordinated to a culturally sanctioned heterosexuality. Indeed, if it is primary bisexuality rather than the Oedipal drama of rivalry which produces the boy’s repudiation of femininity and his ambivalence toward his father, then the primacy of the maternal cathexis becomes increasingly suspect and, consequently, the primary heterosexuality of the boy’s object cathexis.

Regardless of the reason for the boy’s repudiation of the mother (do we construe the punishing father as a rival or as an object of desire who forbids himself as such?), the repudiation becomes the founding moment of what Freud calls gender “consolidation.” Forfeiting the mother as object of desire, the boy either internalizes the loss through identification with her, or displaces his heterosexual attachment, in which case he fortifies his attachment to his father and thereby “consolidates” his masculinity. As the metaphor of consolidation suggests, there are clearly bits and pieces of masculinity to be found within the psychic landscape, dispositions, sexual trends, and aims, but they are diffuse and disorganized, unbounded by the exclusivity of a heterosexual object choice. Indeed, if the boy renounces both aim and object and, therefore, heterosexual cathexis altogether, he internalizes the mother and sets up a feminine superego which dissolves and disorganizes masculinity, consolidating feminine libidinal dispositions in its place.

For the young girl as well, the Oedipal complex can be either “positive” (same-sex identification) or “negative” (opposite-sex identification); the loss of the father initiated by the incest taboo may result either in an identification with the object lost (a consolidation of masculinity) or a deflection of the aim from the object, in which case heterosexuality triumphs over homosexuality, and a substitute object is

found. At the close of his brief paragraph on the negative Oedipal complex in the young girl, Freud remarks that the factor that decides which identification is accomplished is the strength or weakness of masculinity and femininity in her disposition. Significantly, Freud avows his confusion about what precisely a masculine or feminine disposition is when he interrupts his statement midway with the hyphenated doubt: “—whatever that may consist in—” (22).

What are these primary dispositions on which Freud himself apparently founders? Are these attributes of an unconscious libidinal organization, and how precisely do the various identifications set up in consequence of the Oedipal conflict work to reinforce or dissolve each of these dispositions? What aspect of “femininity” do we call dispositional, and which is the consequence of identification? Indeed, what is to keep us from understanding the “dispositions” of bisexuality as the *effects* or *productions* of a series of internalizations? Moreover, how do we identify a “feminine” or a “masculine” disposition at the outset? By what traces is it known, and to what extent do we assume a “feminine” or a “masculine” disposition as the precondition of a heterosexual object choice? In other words, to what extent do we read the desire for the father as evidence of a feminine disposition only because we begin, despite the postulation of primary bisexuality, with a heterosexual matrix for desire?

The conceptualization of bisexuality in terms of *dispositions*, feminine and masculine, which have heterosexual aims as their intentional correlates, suggests that for Freud *bisexuality is the coincidence of two heterosexual desires within a single psyche*. The masculine disposition is, in effect, never oriented toward the father as an object of sexual love, and neither is the feminine disposition oriented toward the mother (the young girl may be so oriented, but this is before she has renounced that “masculine” side of her dispositional nature). In repudiating the mother as an object of sexual love, the girl of necessity repudiates her masculinity and, paradoxically, “fixes” her femininity as a consequence. Hence,

Gender Trouble

within Freud's thesis of primary bisexuality, there is no homosexuality, and only opposites attract.

But what is the proof Freud gives us for the existence of such dispositions? If there is no way to distinguish between the femininity acquired through internalizations and that which is strictly dispositional, then what is to preclude the conclusion that all gender-specific affinities are the consequence of internalizations? On what basis are dispositional sexualities and identities ascribed to individuals, and what meaning can we give to "femininity" and "masculinity" at the outset? Taking the problematic of internalization as a point of departure, let us consider the status of internalized identifications in the formation of gender and, secondarily, the relation between an internalized gender affinity and the self-punishing melancholia of internalized identifications.

In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud interprets the self-critical attitudes of the melancholic to be the result of the internalization of a lost object of love. Precisely because that object is lost, even though the relationship remains ambivalent and unresolved, the object is "brought inside" the ego where the quarrel magically resumes as an interior dialogue between two parts of the psyche. In "Mourning and Melancholia," the lost object is set up within the ego as a critical voice or agency, and the anger originally felt for the object is reversed so that the internalized object now berates the ego:

If one listens patiently to the many and various self-accusations of the melancholic, one cannot in the end avoid the impression that often the most violent of them are hardly applicable to the patient himself, but that with insignificant modifications they do fit someone else, some person whom the patient loves, has loved or ought to love. . . . the self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted onto the patient's own ego. (169)

The melancholic refuses the loss of the object, and internalization becomes a strategy of magically resuscitating the lost object, not only

because the loss is painful, but because the ambivalence felt toward the object requires that the object be retained until differences are settled. In this early essay, Freud understands grief to be the withdrawal of libidinal cathexis from the object and the successful transferral of that cathexis onto a fresh object. In *The Ego and the Id*, however, Freud revises this distinction between mourning and melancholia and suggests that the identification process associated with melancholia may be “the sole condition under which the id can give up its objects” (19). In other words, the identification with lost loves characteristic of melancholia becomes the precondition for the work of mourning. The two processes, originally conceived as oppositional, are now understood as integrally related aspects of the grieving process.³⁵ In his later view, Freud remarks that the internalization of loss is compensatory: “When the ego assumes the features of the object, it is forcing itself, so to speak, upon the id’s loss by saying: ‘Look, you can love me too—I am so like the object’” (20). Strictly speaking, the giving up of the object is not a negation of the cathexis, but its internalization and, hence, preservation.

What precisely is the topology of the psyche in which the ego and its lost loves reside in perpetual habitation? Clearly, Freud conceptualizes the ego in the perpetual company of the ego ideal which acts as a moral agency of various kinds. The internalized losses of the ego are reestablished as part of this agency of moral scrutiny, the internalization of anger and blame originally felt for the object in its external mode. In the act of internalization, that anger and blame, inevitably heightened by the loss itself, are turned inward and sustained; the ego changes place with the internalized object, thereby investing this internalized externality with moral agency and power. Thus, the ego forfeits its anger and efficacy to the ego ideal which turns against the very ego by which it is sustained; in other words, the ego constructs a way to turn against itself. Indeed, Freud warns of the hypermoral possibilities of this ego ideal, which, taken to its extreme, can motivate suicide.³⁶

The construction of the interior ego ideal involves the internal-

Gender Trouble

zation of gender identities as well. Freud remarks that the ego ideal is a solution to the Oedipal complex and is thus instrumental in the successful consolidation of masculinity and femininity:

The super-ego is, however, not simply a residue of the earliest object-choices of the id: it also represents an energetic reaction-formation against these choices. Its relation to the ego is not exhausted by the precept: "You ought to be like this (like your father.)" It also comprises the prohibition: "You *may not be* like this (like your father)—that is, you may not do all that he does; some things are his prerogative." (24)

The ego ideal thus serves as an interior agency of sanction and taboo which, according to Freud, works to consolidate gender identity through the appropriate rechanneling and sublimation of desire. The internalization of the parent as object of love suffers a necessary inversion of meaning. The parent is not only prohibited as an object of love, but is internalized as a *prohibiting* or withholding object of love. The prohibitive function of the ego ideal thus works to inhibit or, indeed, repress the expression of desire for that parent, but also founds an interior "space" in which that love can be *preserved*. Because the solution to the Oedipal dilemma can be either "positive" or "negative," the prohibition of the opposite-sexed parent can either lead to an identification with the sex of the parent lost or a refusal of that identification and, consequently, a deflection of heterosexual desire.

As a set of sanctions and taboos, the ego ideal regulates and determines masculine and feminine identification. Because identifications substitute for object relations, and identifications are the consequence of loss, gender identification is a kind of melancholia in which the sex of the prohibited object is internalized as a prohibition. This prohibition sanctions and regulates discrete gendered identity and the law of heterosexual desire. The resolution of the Oedipal complex affects gender identification through not only the incest taboo, but, prior to that, the taboo against homosexuality. The result is that one identifies

with the same-sexed object of love, thereby internalizing both the aim and object of the homosexual cathexis. The identifications consequent to melancholia are modes of preserving unresolved object relations, and in the case of same-sexed gender identification, the unresolved object relations are invariably homosexual. Indeed, the stricter and more stable the gender affinity, the less resolved the original loss, so that rigid gender boundaries inevitably work to conceal the loss of an original love that, unacknowledged, fails to be resolved.

But clearly not all gender identification is based on the successful implementation of the taboo against homosexuality. If feminine and masculine dispositions are the result of the effective internalization of that taboo, and if the melancholic answer to the loss of the same-sexed object is to incorporate and, indeed, *to become* that object through the construction of the ego ideal, then gender identity appears primarily to be the internalization of a prohibition that proves to be formative of identity. Further, this identity is constructed and maintained by the consistent application of this taboo, not only in the stylization of the body in compliance with discrete categories of sex, but in the production and “disposition” of sexual desire. The language of disposition moves from a verb formation (*to be disposed*) into a noun formation, whereupon it becomes congealed (*to have dispositions*); the language of “dispositions” thus arrives as a false foundationalism, the results of affectivity being formed or “fixed” through the effects of the prohibition. As a consequence, dispositions are not the primary sexual facts of the psyche, but produced effects of a law imposed by culture and by the complicitous and transvaluating acts of the ego ideal.

In melancholia, the loved object is lost through a variety of means: separation, death, or the breaking of an emotional tie. In the Oedipal situation, however, the loss is dictated by a *prohibition* attended by a set of punishments. The melancholia of gender identification which “answers” the Oedipal dilemma must be understood, then, as the internalization of an interior moral directive which gains its structure and energy from an externally enforced taboo. Although Freud does not

explicitly argue in its favor, it would appear that the taboo against homosexuality must *precede* the heterosexual incest taboo; the taboo against homosexuality in effect creates the heterosexual “dispositions” by which the Oedipal conflict becomes possible. The young boy and young girl who enter into the Oedipal drama with incestuous heterosexual aims have already been subjected to prohibitions which “dispose” them in distinct sexual directions. Hence, the dispositions that Freud assumes to be primary or constitutive facts of sexual life are effects of a law which, internalized, produces and regulates discrete gender identity and heterosexuality.

Far from foundational, these dispositions are the result of a process whose aim is to disguise its own genealogy. In other words, “dispositions” are traces of a history of enforced sexual prohibitions which is untold and which the prohibitions seek to render untellable. The narrative account of gender acquisition that begins with the postulation of dispositions effectively forecloses the narrative point of departure which would expose the narrative as a self-amplifying tactic of the prohibition itself. In the psychoanalytic narrative, the dispositions are trained, fixed, and consolidated by a prohibition which later and in the name of culture arrives to quell the disturbance created by an unrestrained homosexual cathexis. Told from the point of view which takes the prohibitive law to be the founding moment of the narrative, the law both produces sexuality in the form of “dispositions” and appears disingenuously at a later point in time to transform these ostensibly “natural” dispositions into culturally acceptable structures of exogamic kinship. In order to conceal the genealogy of the law as productive of the very phenomenon it later claims only to channel or repress, the law performs a third function: Instating itself as the principle of logical continuity in a narrative of causal relations which takes psychic facts as its point of departure, this configuration of the law forecloses the possibility of a more radical genealogy into the cultural origins of sexuality and power relations.

What precisely does it mean to reverse Freud’s causal narrative and

to think of primary dispositions as effects of the law? In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault criticizes the repressive hypothesis for the presumption of an original desire (not “desire” in Lacan’s terms, but *jouissance*) that maintains ontological integrity and temporal priority with respect to the repressive law.³⁷ This law, according to Foucault, subsequently silences or transmutes that desire into a secondary and inevitably dissatisfying form or expression (displacement). Foucault argues that the desire which is conceived as both original and repressed is the effect of the subjugating law itself. In consequence, the law produces the conceit of the repressed desire in order to rationalize its own self-amplifying strategies, and, rather than exercise a repressive function, the juridical law, here as elsewhere, ought to be reconceived as a discursive practice which is productive or generative—discursive in that it produces the linguistic fiction of repressed desire in order to maintain its own position as a teleological instrument. The desire in question takes on the meaning of “repressed” to the extent that the law constitutes its contextualizing frame; indeed, the law identifies and invigorates “repressed desire” as such, circulates the term, and, in effect, carves out the discursive space for the self-conscious and linguistically elaborated experience called “repressed desire.”

The taboo against incest and, implicitly, against homosexuality is a repressive injunction which presumes an original desire localized in the notion of “dispositions,” which suffers a repression of an originally homosexual libidinal directionality and produces the displaced phenomenon of heterosexual desire. The structure of this particular meta-narrative of infantile development figures sexual dispositions as the prediscursive, temporally primary, and ontologically discrete drives which have a purpose and, hence, a meaning prior to their emergence into language and culture. The very entry into the cultural field deflects that desire from its original meaning, with the consequence that desire within culture is, of necessity, a series of displacements. Thus, the repressive law effectively produces heterosexuality, and acts not merely as a negative or exclusionary code, but as a sanction and,

most pertinently, as a law of discourse, distinguishing the speakable from the unspeakable (delimiting and constructing the domain of the unspeakable), the legitimate from the illegitimate.

IV. GENDER COMPLEXITY AND THE LIMITS
OF IDENTIFICATION

The foregoing analyses of Lacan, Riviere, and Freud's *The Ego and the Id* offer competing versions of how gender identifications work—indeed, of whether they can be said to “work” at all. Can gender complexity and dissonance be accounted for by the multiplication and convergence of a variety of culturally dissonant identifications? Or is all identification constructed through the exclusion of a sexuality that puts those identifications into question? In the first instance, multiple identifications can constitute a nonhierarchical configuration of shifting and overlapping identifications that call into question the primacy of any univocal gender attribution. In the Lacanian framework, identification is understood to be fixed within the binary disjunction of “having” or “being” the Phallus, with the consequence that the excluded term of the binary continually haunts and disrupts the coherent posturing of any one. The excluded term is an excluded sexuality that contests the self-grounding pretensions of the subject as well as its claims to know the source and object of its desire.

For the most part, feminist critics concerned with the psychoanalytic problematic of identification have often focused on the question of a maternal identification and sought to elaborate a feminist epistemological position from that maternal identification and/or a maternal discourse evolved from the point of view of that identification and its difficulties. Although much of that work is extremely significant and clearly influential, it has come to occupy a hegemonic position within the emerging canon of feminist theory. Further, it tends to reinforce precisely the binary, heterosexist framework that carves up genders into masculine and feminine and forecloses an adequate description of the kinds of subversive and parodic convergences that characterize gay

and lesbian cultures. As a very partial effort to come to terms with that maternalist discourse, however, Julia Kristeva's description of the semiotic as a maternal subversion of the Symbolic will be examined in the following chapter.

What critical strategies and sources of subversion appear as the consequence of the psychoanalytic accounts considered so far? The recourse to the unconscious as a source of subversion makes sense, it seems, only if the paternal law is understood as a rigid and universal determinism which makes of "identity" a fixed and phantasmatic affair. Even if we accept the phantasmatic content of identity, there is no reason to assume that the law which fixes the terms of that fantasy is impervious to historical variability and possibility.

As opposed to the founding Law of the Symbolic that fixes identity in advance, we might reconsider the history of constitutive identifications without the presupposition of a fixed and founding Law. Although the "universality" of the paternal law may be contested within anthropological circles, it seems important to consider that the *meaning* that the law sustains in any given historical context is less univocal and less deterministically efficacious than the Lacanian account appears to acknowledge. It should be possible to offer a schematic of the ways in which a constellation of identifications conforms or fails to conform to culturally imposed standards of gender integrity. The constitutive identifications of an autobiographical narrative are always partially fabricated in the telling. Lacan claims that we can never tell the story of our origins, precisely because language bars the speaking subject from the repressed libidinal origins of its speech; however, the foundational moment in which the paternal law institutes the subject seems to function as a metahistory which we not only can but ought to tell, even though the founding moments of the subject, the institution of the law, is as equally prior to the speaking subject as the unconscious itself.

The alternative perspective on identification that emerges from psychoanalytic theory suggests that multiple and coexisting identifications produce conflicts, convergences, and innovative dissonances

within gender configurations which contest the fixity of masculine and feminine placements with respect to the paternal law. In effect, the possibility of multiple identifications (which are not finally reducible to primary or founding identifications that are fixed within masculine and feminine positions) suggests that the Law is not deterministic and that “the” law may not even be singular.

The debate over the meaning or subversive possibilities of identifications so far has left unclear exactly where those identifications are to be found. The interior psychic space in which identifications are said to be preserved makes sense only if we can understand that interior space as a phantasized locale that serves yet another psychic function. In agreement with Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok it seems, psychoanalyst Roy Schafer argues that “incorporation” is a fantasy and not a process; the interior space into which an object is taken is imagined, and imagined within a language that can conjure and reify such spaces.³⁸ If the identifications sustained through melancholy are “incorporated,” then the question remains: Where is this incorporated space? If it is not literally within the body, perhaps it is *on* the body as its surface signification such that the body must itself be understood as an incorporated space.

Abraham and Torok have argued that introjection is a process that serves the work of mourning (where the object is not only lost, but acknowledged as lost).³⁹ Incorporation, on the other hand, belongs more properly to melancholy, the state of disavowed or suspended grief in which the object is magically sustained “in the body” in some way. Abraham and Torok suggest that introjection of the loss characteristic of mourning establishes *an empty space*, literalized by the empty mouth which becomes the condition of speech and signification. The successful displacement of the libido from the lost object is achieved through the formation of *words* which both signify and displace that object; this displacement from the original object is an essentially metaphorical activity in which words “figure” the absence and surpass it. Introjection is understood to be the work of mourning, but incor-

poration, which denotes a *magical* resolution of loss, characterizes melancholy. Whereas introjection finds the possibility of metaphorical signification, incorporation is antimetaphorical precisely because it maintains the loss as radically unnameable; in other words, incorporation is not only a failure to name or avow the loss, but erodes the conditions of metaphorical signification itself.

As in the Lacanian perspective, for Abraham and Torok the repudiation of the maternal body is the condition of signification within the Symbolic. They argue further that this primary repression finds the possibility of individuation and of significant speech, where speech is necessarily metaphorical, in the sense that the referent, the object of desire, is a perpetual displacement. In effect, the loss of the maternal body as an object of love is understood to establish the empty space out of which words originate. But the refusal of this loss—melancholy—results in the failure to displace into words; indeed, the place of the maternal body is established in the body, “encrypted,” to use their term, and given permanent residence there as a dead and deadening part of the body or one inhabited or possessed by phantasms of various kinds.

When we consider gender identity as a melancholic structure, it makes sense to choose “incorporation” as the manner by which that identification is accomplished. Indeed, according to the scheme above, gender identity would be established through a refusal of loss that encrypts itself in the body and that determines, in effect, the living versus the dead body. As an antimetaphorical activity, incorporation *literalizes* the loss *on* or *in* the body and so appears as the facticity of the body, the means by which the body comes to bear “sex” as its literal truth. The localization and/or prohibition of pleasures and desires in given “erotogenic” zones is precisely the kind of gender-differentiating melancholy that suffuses the body’s surface. The loss of the pleasurable object is resolved through the incorporation of that very pleasure with the result that pleasure is both determined and prohibited through the compulsory effects of the gender-differentiating law.

The incest taboo is, of course, more inclusive than the taboo against

Gender Trouble

homosexuality, but in the case of the heterosexual incest taboo through which heterosexual identity is established, the loss is borne as grief. In the case of the prohibition against homosexual incest through which heterosexual identity is established, however, the loss is sustained through a melancholic structure. The loss of the heterosexual object, argues Freud, results in the displacement of that object, but not the heterosexual aim; on the other hand, the loss of the homosexual object requires the loss of the aim *and* the object. In other words, the object is not only lost, but the desire fully denied, such that “I never lost that person and I never loved that person, indeed never felt that kind of love at all.” The melancholic preservation of that love is all the more securely safeguarded through the totalizing trajectory of the denial.

Irigaray’s argument that in Freud’s work the structures of melancholy and of developed femininity are very similar refers to the denial of both object and aim that constitutes the “double wave” of repression characteristic of a fully developed femininity. For Irigaray, it is the recognition of castration that initiates the young girl into “a ‘loss’ that radically escapes any representation.”⁴⁰ Melancholia is thus a psychoanalytic norm for women, one that rests upon her ostensible desire to have the penis, a desire which, conveniently, can no longer be felt or known.

Irigaray’s reading, full of mocking citations, is right to debunk the developmental claims regarding sexuality and femininity that clearly pervade Freud’s text. As she also shows, there are possible readings of that theory that exceed, invert, and displace Freud’s stated aims. Consider that the refusal of the homosexual cathexis, desire and aim together, a refusal both compelled by social taboo and appropriated through developmental stages, results in a melancholic structure which effectively encloses that aim and object within the corporeal space or “crypt” established through an abiding denial. If the heterosexual denial of homosexuality results in melancholia and if melancholia operates through incorporation, then the disavowed homosexual love is preserved through the cultivation of an oppositionally defined gen-

der identity. In other words, disavowed male homosexuality culminates in a heightened or consolidated masculinity, one which maintains the feminine as the unthinkable and unnameable. The acknowledgment of heterosexual desire, however, leads to a displacement from an original to a secondary object, precisely the kind of libidinal detachment and reattachment that Freud affirms as the character of normal grief.

Clearly, a homosexual for whom heterosexual desire is unthinkable may well maintain that heterosexuality through a melancholic structure of incorporation, an identification and embodiment of the love that is neither acknowledged nor grieved. But here it becomes clear that the heterosexual refusal to acknowledge the primary homosexual attachment is culturally enforced by a prohibition on homosexuality which is in no way paralleled in the case of the melancholic homosexual. In other words, heterosexual melancholy is culturally instituted and maintained as the price of stable gender identities related through oppositional desires.

But what language of surface and depth adequately expresses this incorporating effect of melancholy? A preliminary answer to this question is possible within the psychoanalytic discourse, but a fuller understanding will lead in the last chapter to a consideration of gender as an enactment that performatively constitutes the appearance of its own interior fixity. At this point, however, the contention that incorporation is a fantasy suggests that the incorporation of an identification is a fantasy of literalization or a *literalizing fantasy*.⁴¹ Precisely by virtue of its melancholic structure, this literalization of the body conceals its genealogy and offers itself under the category of “natural fact.”

What does it mean to sustain a literalizing fantasy? If gender differentiation follows upon the incest taboo and the prior taboo on homosexuality, then “becoming” a gender is a laborious process of becoming *naturalized*, which requires a differentiation of bodily pleasures and parts on the basis of gendered meanings. Pleasures are said to reside in the penis, the vagina, and the breasts or to emanate from them, but such descriptions correspond to a body which has already been constructed

Gender Trouble

or naturalized as gender-specific. In other words, some parts of the body become conceivable foci of pleasure precisely because they correspond to a normative ideal of a gender-specific body. Pleasures are in some sense determined by the melancholic structure of gender whereby some organs are deadened to pleasure, and others brought to life. Which pleasures shall live and which shall die is often a matter of which serve the legitimating practices of identity formation that take place within the matrix of gender norms.⁴²

Transsexuals often claim a radical discontinuity between sexual pleasures and bodily parts. Very often what is wanted in terms of pleasure requires an imaginary participation in body parts, either appendages or orifices, that one might not actually possess, or, similarly, pleasure may require imagining an exaggerated or diminished set of parts. The imaginary status of desire, of course, is not restricted to the transsexual identity; the phantasmatic nature of desire reveals the body not as its ground or cause, but as its *occasion* and its *object*. The strategy of desire is in part the transfiguration of the desiring body itself. Indeed, in order to desire at all it may be necessary to believe in an altered bodily ego⁴³ which, within the gendered rules of the imaginary, might fit the requirements of a body capable of desire. This imaginary condition of desire always exceeds the physical body through or on which it works.

Always already a cultural sign, the body sets limits to the imaginary meanings that it occasions, but is never free of an imaginary construction. The fantasized body can never be understood in relation to the body as real; it can only be understood in relation to another culturally instituted fantasy, one which claims the place of the “literal” and the “real.” The limits to the “real” are produced within the naturalized heterosexualization of bodies in which physical facts serve as causes and desires reflect the inexorable effects of that physicality.

The conflation of desire with the real—that is, the belief that it is parts of the body, the “literal” penis, the “literal” vagina, which cause pleasure and desire—is precisely the kind of literalizing fantasy char-

acteristic of the syndrome of melancholic heterosexuality. The disavowed homosexuality at the base of melancholic heterosexuality reemerges as the self-evident anatomical facticity of sex, where “sex” designates the blurred unity of anatomy, “natural identity,” and “natural desire.” The loss is denied and incorporated, and the genealogy of that transmutation fully forgotten and repressed. The sexed surface of the body thus emerges as the necessary sign of a natural(ized) identity and desire. The loss of homosexuality is refused and the love sustained or encrypted in the parts of the body itself, literalized in the ostensible anatomical facticity of sex. Here we see the general strategy of literalization as a form of forgetfulness, which, in the case of a literalized sexual anatomy, “forgets” the imaginary and, with it, an imaginable homosexuality. In the case of the melancholic heterosexual male, he never loved another man, he *is* a man, and he can seek recourse to the empirical facts that will prove it. But the literalization of anatomy not only proves nothing, but is a literalizing restriction of pleasure in the very organ that is championed as the sign of masculine identity. The love for the father is stored in the penis, safeguarded through an impervious denial, and the desire which now centers on that penis has that continual denial as its structure and its task. Indeed, the woman-as-object must be the sign that he not only never felt homosexual desire, but never felt the grief over its loss. Indeed, the woman-as-sign must effectively displace and conceal that preheterosexual history in favor of one that consecrates a seamless heterosexuality.

V. REFORMULATING PROHIBITION AS POWER

Although Foucault’s genealogical critique of foundationalism has guided this reading of Lévi-Strauss, Freud, and the heterosexual matrix, an even more precise understanding is needed of how the juridical law of psychoanalysis, repression, produces and proliferates the genders it seeks to control. Feminist theorists have been drawn to the psychoanalytic account of sexual difference in part because the Oedipal and pre-Oedipal dynamics appear to offer a way to trace the

primary construction of gender. Can the prohibition against incest that proscribes and sanctions hierarchial and binary gendered positions be reconceived as a productive power that inadvertently generates several cultural configurations of gender? Is the incest taboo subject to the critique of the repressive hypothesis that Foucault provides? What would a feminist deployment of that critique look like? Would such a critique mobilize the project to confound the binary restrictions on sex/gender imposed by the heterosexual matrix? Clearly, one of the most influential feminist readings of Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, and Freud is Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic of Women: The 'Political Economy' of Sex," published in 1975.⁴⁴ Although Foucault does not appear in that article, Rubin effectively sets the stage for a Foucaultian critique. That she herself later appropriates Foucault for her own work in radical sexual theory⁴⁵ retrospectively raises the question of how that influential article might be rewritten within a Foucaultian frame.

Foucault's analysis of the culturally productive possibilities of the prohibitive law clearly takes its bearing within the existing theory on sublimation articulated by Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents* and reinterpreted by Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization*. Both Freud and Marcuse identify the productive effects of sublimation, arguing that cultural artifacts and institutions are the effects of sublimated Eros. Although Freud saw the sublimation of sexuality as producing a general "discontent," Marcuse subordinates Eros to Logos in Platonic fashion and saw in the act of sublimation the most satisfying expression of the human spirit. In a radical departure from these theories of sublimation, however, Foucault argues on behalf of a productive law without the postulation of an original desire; the operation of this law is justified and consolidated through the construction of a narrative account of its own genealogy which effectively masks its own immersion in power relations. The incest taboo, then, would repress no primary dispositions, but effectively create the distinction between "primary" and "secondary" dispositions to describe and reproduce the distinction between a legitimate heterosexuality and an illegitimate homosexuality. Indeed, if we

conceive of the incest taboo as primarily productive in its effects, then the prohibition that founds the “subject” and survives as the law of its desire becomes the means by which identity, particularly gender identity, is constituted.

Underscoring the incest taboo as both a prohibition and a sanction, Rubin writes:

the incest taboo imposes the social aim of exogamy and alliance upon the biological events of sex and procreation. The incest taboo divides the universe of sexual choice into categories of permitted and prohibited sexual partners. (173)

Because all cultures seek to reproduce themselves, and because the particular social identity of the kinship group must be preserved, exogamy is instituted and, as its presupposition, so is exogamic heterosexuality. Hence, the incest taboo not only forbids sexual union between members of the same kinship line, but involves a taboo against homosexuality as well. Rubin writes:

the incest taboo presupposes a prior, less articulate taboo on homosexuality. A prohibition against *some* heterosexual unions assumes a taboo against *nonheterosexual* unions. Gender is not only an identification with one sex; it also entails that sexual desire be directed toward the other sex. The sexual division of labor is implicated in both aspects of gender—male and female it creates them, and it creates them heterosexual. (180)

Rubin understands psychoanalysis, especially in its Lacanian incarnation, to complement Lévi-Strauss’s description of kinship relations. In particular, she understands that the “sex/gender system,” the regulated cultural mechanism of transforming biological males and females into discrete and hierarchized genders, is at once mandated by cultural institutions (the family, the residual forms of “the exchange of women,” obligatory heterosexuality) and inculcated through the laws which structure and propel individual psychic development. Hence,

Gender Trouble

the Oedipal complex instantiates and executes the cultural taboo against incest and results in discrete gender identification and a corollary heterosexual disposition. In this essay, Rubin further maintains that before the transformation of a biological male or female into a gendered man or woman, “each child contains all of the sexual possibilities available to human expression” (189).

The effort to locate and describe a sexuality “before the law” as a primary bisexuality or as an ideal and unconstrained polymorphousness implies that the law is antecedent to sexuality. As a restriction of an originary fullness, the law prohibits some set of prepunitive sexual possibilities and the sanctioning of others. But if we apply the Foucaultian critique of the repressive hypothesis to the incest taboo, that paradigmatic law of repression, then it would appear that the law produces *both* sanctioned heterosexuality and transgressive homosexuality. Both are indeed *effects*, temporally and ontologically later than the law itself, and the illusion of a sexuality before the law is itself the creation of that law.

Rubin’s essay remains committed to a distinction between sex and gender which assumes the discrete and prior ontological reality of a “sex” which is done over in the name of the law, that is, transformed subsequently into “gender.” This narrative of gender acquisition requires a certain temporal ordering of events which assumes that the narrator is in some position to “know” both what is before and after the law. And yet the narration takes place within a language which, strictly speaking, is after the law, the consequence of the law, and so proceeds from a belated and retrospective point of view. If this language is structured by the law, and the law is exemplified, indeed, enacted in the language, then the description, the narration, not only cannot know what is outside itself—that is, prior to the law—but its description of that “before” will always be in the service of the “after.” In other words, not only does the narration claim access to a “before” from which it is definitionally (by virtue of its linguisticity) precluded, but the description of the

“before” takes place within the terms of the “after” and, hence, becomes an attenuation of the law itself into the site of its absence.

Although Rubin claims that the unlimited universe of sexual possibilities exists for the pre-Oedipal child, she does not subscribe to a primary bisexuality. Indeed, bisexuality is the consequence of child-rearing practices in which parents of both sexes are present and presently occupied with child care and in which the repudiation of femininity no longer serves as a precondition of gender identity for both men and women (199). When Rubin calls for a “revolution in kinship,” she envisions the eradication of the exchange of women, the traces of which are evident not only in the contemporary institutionalization of heterosexuality, but in the residual psychic norms (the institutionalization of the psyche) which sanction and construct sexuality and gender identity in heterosexual terms. With the loosening of the compulsory character of heterosexuality and the simultaneous emergence of bisexual and homosexual cultural possibilities for behavior and identity, Rubin envisions the overthrow of gender itself (204). Inasmuch as gender is the cultural transformation of a biological polysexuality into a culturally mandated heterosexuality and inasmuch as that heterosexuality deploys discrete and hierarchized gender identities to accomplish its aim, then the breakdown of the compulsory character of heterosexuality would imply, for Rubin, the corollary breakdown of gender itself. Whether or not gender can be fully eradicated and in what sense its “breakdown” is culturally imaginable remain intriguing but unclarified implications of her analysis.

Rubin’s argument rests on the possibility that the law can be effectively overthrown and that the cultural interpretation of differently sexed bodies can proceed, ideally, without reference to gender disparity. That systems of compulsory heterosexuality may alter, and indeed have changed, and that the exchange of women, in whatever residual form, need not always determine heterosexual exchange, seems clear; in this sense, Rubin recognizes the misogynist implications of Lévi-

Strauss's notoriously nondiachronic structuralism. But what leads her to the conclusion that gender is merely a function of compulsory heterosexuality and that without that compulsory status, the field of bodies would no longer be marked in gendered terms? Clearly, Rubin has already envisioned an alternative sexual world, one which is attributed to a utopian stage in infantile development, a "before" the law which promises to reemerge "after" the demise or dispersal of that law. If we accept the Foucaultian and Derridean criticisms of the viability of knowing or referring to such a "before," how would we revise this narrative of gender acquisition? If we reject the postulation of an ideal sexuality prior to the incest taboo, and if we also refuse to accept the structuralist premise of the cultural permanence of that taboo, what relation between sexuality and the law remains for the description of gender? Do we need recourse to a happier state before the law in order to maintain that contemporary gender relations and the punitive production of gender identities are oppressive?

Foucault's critique of the repressive-hypothesis in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* argues that (a) the structuralist "law" might be understood as one formation of *power*, a specific historical configuration and that (b) the law might be understood to produce or generate the desire it is said to repress. The object of repression is not *the desire* it takes to be its ostensible object, but the multiple configurations of power itself, the very plurality of which would displace the seeming universality and necessity of the juridical or repressive law. In other words, desire and its repression are an occasion for the consolidation 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, mini-

mally, 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

Gender Trouble

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.

Notes

PREFACE (1999)

1. At this printing, there are French publishers considering the translation of this work, but only because Didier Eribon and others have inserted the arguments of the text into current French political debates on the legal ratification of same-sex partnerships.
2. I have written two brief pieces on this issue: "Afterword" for *Butch\Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*, ed. Sally Munt (London: Cassell, 1998), and another Afterword for "Transgender in Latin America: Persons, Practices and Meanings," a special issue of the journal *Sexualities*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1998.
3. Catharine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 6–7.
4. Unfortunately, *Gender Trouble* preceded the publication of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's monumental *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991) by some months, and my arguments here were not able to benefit from her nuanced discussion of gender and sexuality in the first chapter of that book.
5. Jonathan Goldberg persuaded me of this point.
6. For a more or less complete bibliography of my publications and citations of my work, see the excellent work of Eddie Yeghiayan at the University of California at Irvine Library: <http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/~scctr/Wellek/index.html>.
7. I am especially indebted to Bidy Martin, Eve Sedgwick, Slavoj Žižek, Wendy Brown, Saidiya Hartman, Mandy Merck, Lynne Layton, Timothy Kaufmann-Osborne, Jessica Benjamin, Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser,

Gender Trouble

- Diana Fuss, Jay Presser, Lisa Duggan, and Elizabeth Grosz for their insightful criticisms of the theory of performativity.
8. This notion of the ritual dimension of performativity is allied with the notion of the habitus in Pierre Bourdieu's work, something which I only came to realize after the fact of writing this text. For my belated effort to account for this resonance, see the final chapter of *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
 9. Jacqueline Rose usefully pointed out to me the disjunction between the earlier and later parts of this text. The earlier parts interrogate the melancholy construction of gender, but the later seem to forget the psychoanalytic beginnings. Perhaps this accounts for some of the "mania" of the final chapter, a state defined by Freud as part of the disavowal of loss that is melancholia. *Gender Trouble* in its closing pages seems to forget or disavow the loss it has just articulated.
 10. See *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993) as well as an able and interesting critique that relates some of the questions raised there to contemporary science studies by Karen Barad, "Getting Real: Technoscientific Practices and the Materialization of Reality," *differences*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 87–126.
 11. Saidiya Hartman, Lisa Lowe, and Dorinne Kondo are scholars whose work has influenced my own. Much of the current scholarship on "passing" has also taken up this question. My own essay on Nella Larsen's "Passing" in *Bodies That Matter* sought to address the question in a preliminary way. Of course, Homi Bhabha's work on the mimetic splitting of the postcolonial subject is close to my own in several ways: not only the appropriation of the colonial "voice" by the colonized, but the split condition of identification are crucial to a notion of performativity that emphasizes the way minority identities are produced and riven at the same time under conditions of domination.
 12. The work of Kobena Mercer, Kendall Thomas, and Hortense Spillers has been extremely useful to my post-*Gender Trouble* thinking on this subject. I also hope to publish an essay on Frantz Fanon soon engaging questions of mimesis and hyperbole in his *Black Skins, White Masks*. I am grateful to Greg Thomas, who has recently completed his dissertation in rhetoric at Berkeley, on racialized sexualities in the U.S., for provoking and enriching my understanding of this crucial intersection.

Notes to Chapter 1

13. I have offered reflections on universality in subsequent writings, most prominently in chapter 2 of *Excitable Speech*.
14. See the important publications of the Intersex Society of North America (including the publications of Cheryl Chase) which has, more than any other organization, brought to public attention the severe and violent gender policing done to infants and children born with gender anomalous bodies. For more information, contact them at <http://www.isna.org>.
15. I thank Wendy Brown, Joan W. Scott, Alexandra Chasin, Frances Bartkowski, Janet Halley, Michel Feher, Homi Bhabha, Drucilla Cornell, Denise Riley, Elizabeth Weed, Kaja Silverman, Ann Pellegrini, William Connolly, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Ernesto Laclau, Eduardo Cadava, Florence Dore, David Kazanjian, David End, and Dina Al-kassim for their support and friendship during the Spring of 1999 when this preface was written.

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 I: 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).

Notes to Chapter 2

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"; Samoís ed., *Coming to Power* (Berkeley: Samoís, 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,

Gender Trouble

“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* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
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

Notes to Chapter 2

- 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's 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), translated as *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
 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*:

Gender Trouble

- Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987; paperback edition, 1999).
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 1940s* (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

Notes to Chapter 2

- 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 an 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

Gender Trouble

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*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (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, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); *Soleil noir: Dépression et mélancolie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), translated as *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). Kristeva's reading of melancholy in this latter text is based in part on the writings of Melanie Klein. Melancholy is the

Notes to Chapter 2

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

Gender Trouble

- 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 Universities Press, 1968). For a psychoanalytic history of the terms *internalization* and *identification*, see W. W. Meissner, *Internalization in Psychoanalysis* (New York: International Universities Press, 1968).
 39. This discussion of Abraham and Torok is based on “Deuil ou mélancholie, introjecter-incorporer, réalité métapsychologique et fantasme,” in *L'Écorce et le noyau*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1987) translated as *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, ed., trans., and with intro by Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Part of this discussion is also 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. Françoise 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*, Schaefer 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 sexu-