

**Thinking Gender**  
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Also published in the series

*Feminism/Postmodernism*  
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from:-

# **GENDER TROUBLE**

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FEMINISM AND THE  
SUBVERSION  
OF IDENTITY**

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**ROUTLEDGE**

**New York**

**London**

(1990)

notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexual power, to make gender trouble, not through the strategies that figure a utopian beyond, but through the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity.

## 2 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 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 transcultural 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 prejudicial 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 nostalgic 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 presuppositional fictions that entail problematic normative ideals.

Lévi-Strauss' 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' 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 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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' 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.<sup>4</sup> The bride, the gift, the object of exchange constitutes "a sign and a value" that opens a channel of exchange that not only 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.<sup>5</sup> 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' 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' 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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' 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"),<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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' 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*,<sup>10</sup> 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."<sup>11</sup>

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."<sup>12</sup> This rather astonishing statement provides insight not only into Lévi-Strauss' 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.<sup>13</sup>

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.<sup>14</sup> 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 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),<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

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."<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup>

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.<sup>19</sup> 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 reinforces 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.<sup>20</sup> 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 pronomial 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,"<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> This perception or observation not only assumes a correlation among characteristics, desires, and "orientations,"<sup>23</sup> 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 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 "defence," 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 Ferenczi to become complete, it would seem that this description enacts the "defence" 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 "defences" 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 "homo-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."<sup>24</sup>

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 phallicism<sup>25</sup>—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.<sup>26</sup>

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 differentiat-

ing 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 analyst'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,"<sup>27</sup> suggesting that sexual division, effected through repression, is invariably undermined by the very ruse of identity. But is it not a predicursive 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 pre-discursive reality ('How return, other than by means of a special discourse, to a predicursive 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."<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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 predicursive 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 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?<sup>30</sup> 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"<sup>31</sup> and Kristeva identifies motherhood with melancholy in "Motherhood According to Bellini" as well as *Soleil noir: Dépression et mélancolie*,<sup>32</sup> 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."<sup>33</sup> 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 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.<sup>34</sup> 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 precipitate 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." For-

feiting 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, 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 transfer 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup>

The construction of the interior ego ideal involves the internalization 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 finds 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 dispo-



sition 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.<sup>37</sup> 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 metanarrative of infantile development figures sexual dispositions as the pre-discursive, 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 identifica-

tions 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 phantasmized 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.<sup>36</sup> 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).<sup>39</sup> 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 incorporation, which denotes a *magical* resolution of loss, characterizes melancholy. Whereas introjection founds 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 founds 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 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."<sup>40</sup> 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 gender 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*.<sup>41</sup> 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 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.

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, simi-

larly, 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 ego<sup>43</sup> 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 characteristic 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.<sup>44</sup> 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 theory<sup>45</sup> 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 immer-

sion 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 *non*heterosexual 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, 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 loosen-

ing 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,<sup>46</sup> and there is a second-order dispute over what, if anything, the claim to universality might imply about the meaning of social processes.<sup>47</sup> 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 homosexuality 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.<sup>48</sup>

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

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

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

### 3

## Subversive Bodily Acts

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### i. The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva

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

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