



Gender Urinary Segregation

Gender Urinary Segregation and Political Correctness¹

Qui quae vult dicit, quae non vult nautiet²

Photography by Meghan Nolt—Montana Kaimin.

Alternative signs hang over the plaques marking both the men's and women's restrooms on the third floor of the UC during the "Gender Expansion Conference" on Saturday, March 20 2015. The sign reads "*all gender restroom—without urinals—anyone can use this restroom regardless of gender identity or expression.*"³

Introduction: The Premise

The comprehensive list of LGBTQ+ Vocabulary Definitions *Guide to Gender: The Social Justice Handbook*, elaborated under the guise of safety (Safe Zone project), anti-victimhood, and respect for difference, was put together by Sam Killermann's.

Motivated by a desire to help "people make sense of the alphabet soup," and be as respectful and accurate as possible when using "sexual identifying language," Killermann presents himself as an activist, educator, and artist. He is also "Director of Creativity for Hues" (a global justice collective inspired by the Rainbow coalition—he uses the same "colors metaphor") who created sites such as, *The Safe Zone Project* (a free online resource for LGBTQ awareness and "ally-ship" training workshops). He is the author of a TedxTalk, "*Understanding the Complexities of Gender*," and wrote *The Sexualitree* (a comprehensive sexuality model and curriculum, with downloads), *Singular They*, as well as the *Sexual Orientation for the Genderqueer Person*.

For Killermann's "show and tell" "LGBTQ+ project," desire is similar to the alphabet soup (the author's metaphor) whose spoon-full our mothers used to try to coax or cajole into our mouths when we were toddlers.

Each swallow of the liquid letters which peppered the breast's milk substitute was accompanied by an a-l-literal, pouting bubbling and smeared stumble which, Mommy, with a careful spoon swipe would re-introduce in our mouths.

Semes of mushy, written language, bits and pieces of Mommy's voice, attention, and gaze, i.e. a literal morsel-ling of her body, are all mixed randomly in this apparently simple semiotic soup of pre-Oedipal desire until we, pushing the envelope to test Mommy's love, shove the bowl over the high-chair's edge.

The oral drive, the desire to please Mom, the apprenticeship of language and reading, and the *fort/da* game of our anxiety about Mommy's love and availability, highlighted these 'precious' moments when Daddy was not yet around, not fully in the picture (and in full regalia), when the "*name-of-the-father*," the grand "party pooper" did not exert his rule to split the monomial

relation into a binomial one.

Of Monom, Binom and Polynoms

Likewise, the alphabet soup allegory used by the *LBGTq+ project*, explicitly and implicitly asks us to return to the privileged time when individualized letters were free-floating around in what Freud would call a “primary” (short of primeval) soup, randomly caught by the motherly spoon, forming beforehand a pre-text similar to what Freud called the “polymorphous perverse,” Kristeva, the “*genotext*,” and Deleuze and Guattari (positively) “chaosmosis.”

This brew is monomial and could later produce a polynomial serialization of sexual expressions/orientations, à la Sam Kellermann, if, and only if, the incest taboo did not interfere, i.e. if there were no unconscious, no Other. This monomaniacal origin could be the retroactive originator of powers of variables (as full-fledged identities) if, and only if, the negative integer exponent (*the name-of-the-father*) did not exist or was excluded; if the phallus (signifier of the lack) was not the only signifier capable of designating “*as a whole the effect of there being a signified*” (which is a semblance of course, but a necessary semblance).⁴

In other words, for sexual-identity performers the monomial child-m(o)ther is a retroactive, fantasy-product, itself producing Imaginary variables with repetitions (hence the Facebook and LBGTQ+’s 40+ sexual identities—all variations on the same and variables of the monomial “One+”). The problem with such a pluralist and “serialist” production of sexual identities is that an “Other” does interfere with the “One +” (i.e. the m(o)ther-child) in order to produce the future dyad m(o)ther and child *and* binary sexual identities and not a polynomial series. The Real (Lacanian meaning) of sex realizes in the present its own past, which bears testimony to lack, castration and unconscious

Otherness—not consciously chosen others. In Lacanian theory, the LBGTQ+’s alphabet soup would correspond to what Lacan calls the *object a*, i.e. what lies at the core of the fantasmatic identity of the subject.

So the LBGTQ+’s “liquid letters” metaphor is well chosen since it unwittingly (?) underscores/underwrites a basically anti-Oedipal project—for good or bad reasons/motivations; meaning, is it a progressive step forward in the march of human liberation by freeing desire from contingency and arbitrary oppression, a searching process inventing new narratives of desires with no precedent in our cultures, or a regressive path making everybody its/their/theirs/his/ze/zir/her/zee/zerr/zeer... own Imaginary’s prisoner, the result of a naïve, short-sighted logic and confused sentimentality?

The LBGTQ+ project sexualizes a-posteriori the original, monomial letters of Mommy’s soup by attributing to each infantile iteration and re-iteration an identity during a period when the toddler’s lack has not yet taken any signification: hence the 40 + repetitions/declensions or variations on the same theme, and the confusion between expression and identity (or “structure” and “style” to use Lacanian psychoanalysis).

Since the LBGTQ+’s alphabet letters are supposed to decline the whole gamut of the alphabet



of desire, away from any paternal metaphor or “signifier of the lack,” this is why not only do the project’s authors have to invent a “third sex,” but also a myriad others as well (see the list in the endnotes). The list pretends to be neither comprehensive nor “inviolable.” It is a work in progress because, according to the LGBTQ+ understanding of sexual reality, sexual identities are growing every day and even could be numbered by the thousands. Why not? The sky is the limit. “To each according to his desire” is the motto of capitalism which makes us regress to this “ideal,” Imaginary state when each consumer is baby-like, following the whimsies of the day, and where any object (things, animals, plants, forms, machines, monuments...) can become the support and consume the fantasy of the consumer, i.e. letters which can be bought and exchanged—no longer the Letter of a “*père-version*,” but an inscription of the momentary, transitory (governed by the “here-and-there” and “now-and-then”) version of the “*vers*” (towards), which is the trans/trance-movement of desire itself..., towards its implosion:

*“Very gradually, sexual life comes to an end the way it began. Having awakened first to dreams before coming to reality, it is in the end returning to the fantasy, to the imagining of the first sexual objects—like the fetishism connected with the first arousals in one’s immediate milieu.”*⁵

From Alphabet Soup to Crusty Pie or Having One’s Cake and Eating it too

The American anthropologist and queer theorist Gale Rubin goes the extra mile by presupposing sexual life as a circle with “a *charmed inner circle*,” constituted by binaries such as couple/alone, or in groups, monogamous/promiscuous, same generation/cross-generational, bodies only/with manufactured objects..., etc., and an outside, forbidden, out-of-the-inner-circle area, were the sexual life escaping binary gender restrictions and compulsory heterosexuality exists.

With Mimi Marinucci, this circle becomes a pie, of infinite dimensions, or at least able to be infinitely divided (remember Zeno’s paradox):

“Rubin’s circle can be thought of as an infinitely divisible pie. Divided into enough slices, it is hard to imagine that there is anyone whose sexuality would not be situated on the crusty outer edge of at least some of those slices. Crusty is deviant. Edgy is queer.

In this sense, everyone is a sexual deviant in at least some way or another.

*In this sense, everyone is at least a little queer, even those who are further from the edgy crust and closer to the gooey center on that one slice of the sex pie that represents the contrast between heterosexual and homosexual pairing.”*⁶

The idea is to liberate “sexual expression” as an object of desire from any constraints of figuration and return it to the pure Imaginary play of forms, a primary multi-directional onanism which wants to pass as a sexual communication (“expression”). To achieve this goal, “sex” must be detached from any prescribed bodies, from the idea of a hidden governing (unconscious) structure, from a more rigorous and radical objectivity (the one provided by psychoanalysis for instance). It must then be tailored according to the whimsies of the customer-host, in order to accommodate any appearances and resemblances, any affinities, likes or



dislikes, which are then essentialized via a name and a practice, and then (final step), turned into identities.

The *Guide* is therefore constantly being honed and adjusted for language, since sex-identities pop up here and there, like mushrooms on a rainy day. According to its author, the definitions must “resonate” with at least 51 out of 100 people who use the words. The *Guide* is democratic, since it is governed by a “majority vote of one.” Since sexual identity terms are tricky, the *Guide*’s author cautions us to be careful because a description that works perfectly for everyone using that label simply isn’t possible (one cannot help wondering why! And also, if Killermann is serious or just having fun while laughing all the way to the bank!). Since it is an ever-evolving project, like a dictionary, the *Guide* is updated every four months.

Rationale and Discussion

There are many reasons why “sexual identities” proliferate today and are perceived by many as being as flexible, modular and changeable at will, as if made of rubber; as if the pleasure principle was a moveable, plastic feast.

The first one is the tendency of the financial and socio-economic fluxes of neo-capital to de-territorialize ‘everything’ (produces/products, objects, materials, and the physicality of the world, as well as human emotions and affects), to use a Deleuzian concept.

The second is the tendency, directly related to global capital, to de-essentialize, “de-nature” and “format” socio-cultural-economic life’s materiality, so that its different aspects can take on the logic of a commodity, can be marked and imprinted with the linguistic sign’s logic (coded by the System), and thus be easily inscribed/inserted in the grand carousel of commodities by circular permutation while obeying the law of exchange-value dictated by the standard arbitrator/referent of equivalence, the monetary sign (\$, Euro, Yen, etc.).

Both tendencies transform the binary sign/object opposition/ difference mediated by the reference function into something new. The sign then becomes a pure signifier detached from any signified and traditional modes of reference or referential (the Lacanian Symbolic system). This gives to the socio-cultural environment of consumerism a flexible, moveable dimension. The effects of the variability/flexibility/mutability of signs not only directly inform the fluidity and volatility of desire but plug themselves into it. In Lacanian term, one would say that the drive of capital (the circular exchange, fluxes and flows of financial capital and commodities, counter-clockwise or clockwise accordingly, like the paths of hurricanes between the West and the East, the North and the South, America and Asia...) puts desire into over-drive, plugging directly the Imaginary into the Real with minimum (or strongly reduced) interactions/ mediations from the Symbolic.

The gender proliferation espoused and promoted by the LBGTQ+’s logic obeys more the logic of erratic excess and the cultivation of pleasure generated by late capitalism than the logic of liberation, progress and emancipation. Neo-capitalism has already more or less eroded any totalizing normality and replace it with its own based on drift, erring, estrangement, de-construction, de-territorialization, change and speed. The gender proliferation inscribes itself

into the same flux. It is not a genuine, progressive cultural revolution but an acting out responding to the cultural multiplicity of revolving intensities generated by consumerist capitalism, as Slavoj Žižek explains in his book, *Organs Without Bodies*, while taking on the Deleuzian philosophy which pretends to use neo-capitalism as a forward, liberating march into the future. Deleuze and Guattari, with their *Anti-Oedipus*, aimed at making the Oedipus complex (cornerstone of Freudian psychoanalysis) which they deemed reductionist, obsolete by complexifying it, making it implode by saturation, and then use the processual enrichment yielded by the ensuing implosion to feed the newly released energy into virtual lines of bifurcation, of differentiation, of rhizomic expansion via lines of flight and molecular lines opposed to the molar lines of institutionalized concepts. Their ultimate goal was the destruction of homogeneity, universalism and totality in the name of a “fractal ontology” of heterogeneity which would liberate and provoke the emergence of individual potentialities.

The problem is that it is exactly what postmodern capitalism has accomplished and is still accomplishing since the 1980s. Žižek makes it clear via a detour using Jean-Jacques Lecercle’s parable of the yuppie reading Deleuze and Guattari’s *What is Philosophy* on the Paris metro, in his *Pedagogy of Philosophy*:

*“What, however, if there is... but enthusiasm, when the yuppie reads about impersonal imitation of affects, about the communication of affective intensities beneath the level of meaning (“Yes, this is how I design my publicities!”), or when he reads about exploding the limits of self-contained subjectivity and directly coupling man to a machine (“This reminds me of my son’s favorite toy, the action-man that can turn into a car!”), or about the need to reinvent oneself permanently, opening oneself up to a multitude of desires that push us to the limit (“Is this not the aim of the virtual sex video game I am working on now? It is no longer a question of reproducing sexual bodily contact but of exploding the confines of established reality and imagining new, unheard-of intensive modes of sexual pleasures!”). There are, effectively, features that justify calling Deleuze the ideologist of late capitalism. Is the much celebrated Spinozan *imitatio affecti*, the impersonal circulation of affects bypassing persons, not the very logic of publicity, of video-clips, and so forth in which what matters is not the message about the product but the intensity of the transmitted affects and perceptions? Furthermore, recall again the hard-core pornographic scenes in which the very unity of the bodily self-experience is magically dissolved, so that the spectator perceives the bodies as a kind of vaguely coordinated agglomerate of partial objects. Is this logic in which we are no longer dealing with persons interacting but just with the multiplicities of intensities, of places of enjoyment, plus bodies as a collective/impersonal desiring machine not eminently Deleuzian?”⁷*

The vogue of sexual categories started with pleasure and consumerism and is directly linked to the affirmation of gay counter-culture and queer theory. It first started in gay clubs to facilitate the *dragage* (cruising/ picking-up/ hooking-up) so that one’s sexual preference (conflated here to “one’s specific way of coming”) could be communicated quickly to minimize time-loss (searching for the “right partner”), and maximize “quality-time” (enjoying the “right” partner). For instance, if a gay male likes to be penetrated but also likes to have the upper hand in a relationship, he would say or wear a badge with the inscription “*cismale gay power-bottom*.” The preferences, categories, and positions linked to *jouissance* were created to attract the adequate partner who would/could then plug into the *dragueur’s*/searcher’s specific desire.

These literally emoticons-like, little consumerist signifiers, then tended to take on a life of their own. They became independent propagated and propelled by the energy of the market. With consumerism, seduction itself was not spared. It became the capital seduction to be marketed as well as the capital(ist) seduction of the market itself. Inverting the passage from that which functions as a general structure to that which functions as a singular tendency, the partial logic of these partial signifiers turned the hierarchy upside down, trying to enthrone categories while dethroning the unifying principle. The problem is that human sexuality does not escape the incest taboo and wo/man binary **sexuation**; as Lacan said during the 1968 French Cultural Revolution “*structures do not walk into the streets.*” That is to say, one cannot take one’s desires for the reality.

Pluralism of Choices Against Binarism

One of the first effects of this quasi-law-like mutability in the sexual domain is to increase the arbitrariness of what is already arbitrary (as Lacan explained) with regards to the sexual divide.

In his XXth Seminar (*Encore*, 1972–1973), Lacan, (nicknamed the “French Freud,” although Lacanian praxis—theory and clinical practice is more neo-Freudian), theorized sexual difference as a “**sexuation**” (complete with a graph prefaced by a few of his famous “mathemes” derived from formal logic and theory of sets) depicting the non-biological (or beyond biology to be more exact), “de-”naturalized, subject-positions of masculinity and femininity. Lacan purported to uncover an inherent, unconscious-governed, subliminal and ineliminable structural difference or discrepancy and gap separating the binary sexes. This quasi-law depicts an inescapable tragic, structural logic, condemning speaking human beings and sexed subjects not only to be inherently split within themselves (as to the, origins, causes and effects of their desires), but also to being essentially, necessarily out-of-sync with each other (something women have complained about for millennia). Lacan summarized this structural impossibility with his now famous sentential declaration: “*Il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel*” (There is no sexual relationship between the sexes).

This makes the “gender divide” appears more uncertain, and therefore constraining and unnecessary, something consumerism was quick to focus on. Gender, then, had to be submitted to the law of exchange-value and to what appears/seems to be the rule of individual choice and self-determining subjectivity.

This subversive “negative capability” of postmodern capital seems to illustrate, satisfy, and fit, at first glance, the Deleuzian liberating rule of de-territorialization, and the Lacanian maxim of the ethics of psychoanalysis: “*the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one’s desire.*” (Lacan. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. 314.) In fact, is not one of the Master injunctions of capital, conveyed via advertising, to obey or follow one’s desire, enjoy now and pay later? And since we do know that the power of a body is measure in terms of affects, the liberation of affects from the destiny of the body and the liberation of bodies from the rule of affectual gendering should liberate bodies and affects for capital—using the pretext of personal freedom as an incentive (the whispering mode of the snake in the apple tree—so that everybody can have their cake and eat it too).



The price to pay, of course, is the short-circuiting of the Symbolic system to the advantage of the Imaginary which is freer to reign supreme. The whole question is the following: is this a true liberation? What is the ultimate price to pay? Does this bring us closer to an ultimate liberation from rules and constraints, allowing the emergence of a more authentic self, of a Nietzschean type of post-civilization wo/man, or of a Sadeian type of individual?

Is the de-substantialization of gender the result of the postmodern rule of neo-capital? Its cultural by-product? Was gender rule the genuine origin of the general sexual malaise and oppression felt by many of our contemporaries? Is our contemporary “liquidification” of sex and gender the liquidation of gender-oppression? Does this liquefaction really escape gender-rule? Is living one’s sexual desire (bi or homosexual) a real de-gendering of sexuation?

Or course not, since *sexuation* includes and implies its own violation/difference or (*père-)*version as Lacan’s graph of *sexuation* shows. Obviously homosexuals are governed by gender-rule—if not the very expression would not make any sense. It is not a sexual identity but a version of the same; a variation on the same theme. Hegel wrote that unity carries dualism, duality or contradictions within it, via the different principles that classical logic call *ex-toto*, *ex-nihilo*, and *ex-separato*. 1 is opposed to 2, then becomes 2, in order to be reborn as 3 in dialectics. 2 makes 1 in dialogics (via what is called *separato*) that is to say that a new unit is formed from that from which it is separated.

What is important to remember is that the whole functions in such a way that it is present within every one of its parts. The whole is based on the parts, which, likewise, reversing the courtesy, are based on the whole. There is a hologrammatic principle in human civilizations which expresses itself through structures, and which forces the parts constituting the whole to always function in such a way that the whole is contained /present within every one of its parts—something identity politics has a tendency to forget. That is to say that under the sun of the phallus, on the *sexuation* divide, one does not escape the unifying, universal law by which the two genders and their “*père-version*”/diversion/inversion are but the products of a process and become producers of a process that produces them, from which one does not escape, unless one annihilates the object of desire/*jouissance* and falls into the pure *jouissance* of the Big Other (God) such as do Medieval recluses, monks or nuns, yogis, holy men, etc.

Wo/men/cultures are defined by their attempts at escaping the laws of nature. Sexuality is already an unconscious way of escaping the laws of nature. Progress and emancipation imply a certain calculated way of trying to escape nature... But are the attempts at escaping the laws of *sexuation* genuine crossings of foundational forms’ barriers? Of “subjectified substances”?

One fantasizes that one can escape gender-definition and the phallic function and destiny, (what Deleuze calls the subordination of the becoming of humans to the logic of the genus which is directly linked to the destiny of the family—an oppressive and reactionary defect which, for Deleuze and Guattari, characterizes and limits normative Freudian psychoanalysis), and there is nothing wrong with this, as long as one does not believe that the moon is made of green cheese, i.e. that by letting one’s identity fall in an LBGQTQ+ category, one becomes a self-made wo/man... By the same token, trying to impose the choice of new pronouns on the human collectivity or socius (it/their/them/zer...) as a better fit for one’s body/desire, is but an empty



gesture; it is more like whipping the surface of a pond in order to make consequential ripples than a genuinely creative gesture such as the process of swirling turbulences that create the stars, matter and so on....

Queer feminists would then reply, that the whole task is to destroy the law of the phallic signifier as foundational signifier of desire—something that feminists have tried to do for decades, as Joan Copjec shows in her seminal book *Read My Desire*.

But beyond this destruction of male/female normative sexuality, two correlated, more or less hidden objectives exist. One is the destruction of the other sex:

“The height of sexism is to regard the other sex as a different race. This is the objective of ‘hard’ feminism: a world expurgated of the male race. This is the same, though opposite, as happens in Il mondo senza donne. The same eradication of the other on a homosexual basis, or a sisterly basis, a basis of twinship or incest.

The other tendency is, rather, to supplant men in positions of power. The male position being virtually unoccupied (since man has virtually disappeared), the feminists are in an enormous hurry to move into it, and they naturally fall into the trap that is the void of power itself. In the same way, political power being emptied of its substance, the Left rushed to seize it and immediately disintegrated in the void.”⁸

The other implies that the incest taboo would have to be abolished in order to destroy any constraints/restrains on sex and to bend gender until it breaks—which may signify the end of desire. The ultimate escape from gender-rule and so-called sexual exploitation/oppression implies the abolition of the incest-taboo (something most queer theorists refuse to even acknowledge).

Biologists’ Mistake

For biologists, human sexuality is a functional, animalistic condition, the product of the environment and evolution, obeying instinctual and normative laws geared towards the reproduction of the species. Sexuality obeys electro-chemical impulses generated in the brain (cognitivism) and follows genetic program-like imprints in a deterministic mode. This type of positivist explanation privilege purely materialist conceptions of the body as given/imposed by nature (strangely following a re-vamped Cartesian dualism). Its avatars such as physical essentialism, empiricism (scientific tools allow the collection/gathering of data—Masters and Johnson; The Kinsey Report...), experiential and behavioral psychology, evolutionary biology..., all forego any cultural and/or psychoanalytical explanations/interpretations. For them nature predominates over culture, although social, civil, and legal norms maintain and regulate these innate, natural functions. According to this interpretation which wants to pass as absolute (science-based), deviations (homosexuality for instance) are seen as generated in the brain or even the result of a different coding of the genome, or the result of hierarchical, dominance-based behavior (some scientists speak of “the homosexuality gene,” while others speak of homosexual behavior in societies of primates.) Many biologists, brain-specialists, and human scientists, believe that human sexuality obeys normative/regulative functions exercising their



power from an extraneous position (inherent to the body but outside of consciousness) and making their laws felt in the field of daily life where their power is applied: causality runs from body to mind, and from sex to gender.

Curiously enough, although racism is a metonymic naturalization/essentialization of physical differences, many homosexuals often prefer a biological explanation for the origin of sexual desire:

“The strange assent among homosexuals to their being defined genetically. They prefer their difference to be biologically legalized. In the end, everyone prefers genes as the perfect alibi. The unconscious served in time as universal justification. But that was still a psychical agency. Now it is biology that is becoming the juridical guarantee, the basis of legal argument. Difference, positive or negative, is being embodied in an immanent reason. Gene biology and sociobiology seem to have a bright future ahead of them.”⁹

The Historicists or American Foucauldians’ mistake

The origin of the mistake is based on their belief that human sexuality does not obey any given or pre-ordained/pre-determinate laws, or even a pre-determined reality re-enforcing itself via language. Sex is not theorized or privileged as an outside which pre-exists culture, i.e. the normative (bodies must occupy their proper places—hence the repressive dimension of normative sex enforced by a particular society), and the operations of power guaranteeing a certain accepted sexual behavior, what queer theorists call the hegemony (dominance, repression and oppression) of heterosexuality. Foucault, contrary to biologists, cognitivists, and human scientists, believed that sex is not only immanent, but also mutually interdependent with norms. For him, it is an “at once produced and producing process,” following a constant back-and-forth movement between cause and effect, like Escher’s hand drawing itself. For Foucault, sex is descriptive and discursive, normative and speculative, producing its own practices while subverting its own rules and norms. One can understand why queer theorists (Butler for instance) followed Foucault blindly, since sexual behavior can escape the assignment/consignment of sex to/by, gender’s normativity. Their mutual interdependence can be pried open by counter-cultural moves, militancy, rebellious sexual activities and practices... Sexual freedom means, here, the freedom of choosing one’s way and partner with whom one chose to orgasm (pleasure principle), and becomes the result of a revolutionary practice, in the same way as class-domination revolution—or so it is believed.

The American Foucauldians adduced an idealism of sexual production/behavior based on choice and creativeness (curiously enough in synch with what neo-capitalism and consumerism proposes). One chooses or invents one’s gender and one’s object of choice at will—the sky is the limit: homo or hetero-sex with different partners of the same or other sex, sex with objects, with animals. Some people even go as far as marrying objects, monuments, or their pets, although the champions of free sexual choice have the tendency to privilege homosexuality.

American application of Historicism and Foucauldianism: Butler’s Performativeness.

Judith Butler’s intelligent and informed theorizing has a direct practical, political, and militant

agenda, exposing the artificial, proscribed, and performative nature of gender identity by throwing stones and pebbles into the apparently calm and natural surface of sexual certitude. She “disturbs gender” (*Gender Troubles*) and challenges the “sexual status quo” to induce political progress for the rights of marginalized, gay, and lesbian identities.

Butler wants to change people’s minds about sexual identities by de-essentializing these identities. Following Simone de Beauvoir’s existential view of feminineness (one is not born a woman, one becomes one) and, influenced by Althusser’s notions of cultural hegemony (he himself borrowed from Gramsci), of over-determination (he borrowed from psychoanalysis), and Ideological and State Apparatuses, Butler de-natures the belief that gender is nature-given. She shows that gendered behavior (associated with femininity/masculinity) is an act, a performance, a construction imposed upon us all by hegemonic, normative heterosexuality. Here Butler is directly influenced by the British psychoanalyst Joan Riviere’s “*Womanliness as a Masquerade*,” an essay analyzing the sexual feminine as a defensive mask put on to hide masculinity.

Riviere’s feminineness or “*masquerade*” also influenced Lacan’s Imaginary and Symbolic “feminine sexual attitude.” Butler and late 20th century’s feminists and film theory critics appropriated (while changing its intention) Riviere’s “feminine performative” to de-essentialize and deconstruct gender: we are not our “bodies.” We merely “act and pretend” to be our bodies as if on a stage (Shakespearean “*the world is a stage*”) by following a prescribed script imposed on us via culture and education (Althusser’s Ideological Apparatuses). In order to deconstruct gender’s imposition, Butler claim that people are not self-governing agents but are subjectified and reified by “*constituting acts..., constituting the identity of the actor...[and] constituting that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of belief.*” But, Butler also questions “sexual idealist constructivists’ self-assurance” because she doubts the extent to which “free,” “self-choosing” individuals can change and constitute new sexual identities (as in theatrical acting). She consequently investigates the extent to which humans’ sexual identity is determined by (or co-valent with) their place within culture: language, conventions, taboo.

Butler follows poststructuralist practice in using the term “subject” (rather than “individual” or “person”) in order to underline the linguistic nature of our subjective positioning within what Jacques Lacan calls the Symbolic order (system of signs and conventions over-determining our perception of reality). She argues that the very daily routine-act of “gender performance” constitutes our sexual identity, **and nothing else**: sexual identity is an illusion retroactively created by our performances: there is no gendered self prior to its acts. Like the existentialists (de Beauvoir), Butler thinks that existence precedes essence. She believes that, retroactively, the repetitive performance of an imposed sexual identity (education, training...), re-enforced and compelled by social sanction and taboos as well as subtle and obvious coercion, convinces human beings that “sexual identity” is nature-given.

Following Foucault and borrowing from Kristeva, Butler also concludes that this cultural, sexual normativity and exclusivity creates a disgusting “otherness” and intolerable difference: “*a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies.*” In a quasi- Zizekian move, Butler thinks that abjection is used by the normally/normatively obedient or docile subject to constitute him/herself as such via rejection/exclusion: “*This zone of uninhabitability will constitute the defining limit of the subject’s domain; it will constitute that site of dreaded identification against, which—and by*

virtue of which—the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life.” This “quasi –organic” or phobic repudiation is necessary for the subject to establish “*an identification with the normative phantasm of ‘sex.’*” Butler, in a very feminist move (influenced by Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous’ feminism) uses that concept of “abjected zone” (which, according to Kristeva, is sub-liminal— i.e. a liminality between consciousness and the unconscious) to “*rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility.*” She even goes farther by declaring that gender, as an objective, natural thing, does not exist: “*Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed.*” Gender, according to Butler, is by no means tied to material bodily facts but is solely and completely a social construction, a fiction, one that, therefore, is open to change and contestation: “*Because there is neither an ‘essence’ that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis.*” So far so good, except that Butler negates or forgets structure, incest taboo, the Mirror Stage, the unconscious, the Oedipus and Electra complexes...

Gender is concealed because of *sexuation* and cannot be unveiled discursively. But because of her agenda, Butler is persuaded (and wants to persuade others) that sexual genesis is only performative and that the body becomes its gender only “*through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time.*” Using gender-construction’s artificial/conventional/historical dimension as a machine-de-guerre, Butler attempts to destroy normative heterosexuality’s assumptions: those “punitive” social/familial/legal rules forcing us to conform to hegemonic, heterosexual standards for identity. Butler nearly believes that homosexuality would reign if it were not for “heterosexual fascism.”

Lacanian theory had already problematizes gender and sex by stating that there is a structural imbalance between the male and the female sides of *sexuation*, the “*all*” and the “*not-all*,” because there is only one signifier to cover the lack (and absence) of the repressed primary object of desire: the m(o)ther. The phallus as “signifier of the lack” covers the primary object (the m(o)ther) for the male side of *sexuation*, expressing his desire on the one hand (the *all*). On the other hand, i.e. on the female side of *sexuation*, the other (or binary) signifier which would cover the primary object, (the m(o)ther), is missing. Lacan calls it the “*not all*,” since this “lack of a lack” does not express in a complete or satisfying fashion the female lack (hence the expression *not-all*)—even if women opt for the “phallic signifier of the lack” attached to generally a male body, (or even a female body—and many do!).

Women’s acceptance of the phallus as “signifier of the lack” to “signify their own lack” corresponds to what Joan Rivière calls “*the masquerade.*” In a compensatory move, culture tries to re-cover a unity and bridge the sexual gap and dissymmetry by trying to provide a symmetrical, signifying dyad or couple for sexual difference. But the binary signifier always lacks. It is fraught with troubling lack. The coupling does not couple well for the couple. It is often felt as a yoke by the female partner.

Well, is this postmodern, consumerist proliferation of genders and sexual identities not a desperate, quasi-agonized way for culture to attempt to compensate for the lack inscribed in



the foundational gender bridge supposed to stand for sexual difference? In our contemporaneity this lack more and more provokes feelings of strong ambivalence, if not rage. It is as if, today, the “trouble with gender,” and gender problems had become unbearable. Gender’s lack of coherence induces incoherence and inchoate reasoning. It is seen as a primary and scandalous affront to selfhood and egotism—hence the various sexual identity politics.

Butler takes her formulations even further by questioning the very distinction between gender and sex. In the sixties and seventies, feminists regularly made a distinction between bodily sex (the *corporeal* facts of our existence) and gender (the *social* conventions that determine the differences between masculinity and femininity). Many feminists accepted the fact that anatomical differences do exist between men and women; but they were also quick to denounce the fact that the conventions that determine men’s and women’s behaviors are psycho-social/cultural constructions that do not have much to do with genuine corporeal advantages or disadvantages based on sexual differences. It is of course true that the belief in gender-based physiological and psychological differences has been used, throughout history, to limit and straightjacket women into roles and categories via material re-ification and “naturalization/essentialization” of/on/in the female bodies, and cultural propaganda/norms (what is now called sexism). For many feminists sex is a biological category, while gender is a cultural historical category (hence the label “historicists” given to them by feminist Lacanians). Following the postmodern continental thinkers and critics of the 70s and 80s, Butler, as she put it in *Bodies*, sex is an idealist construct materialized through time via the heterosexual, patriarchal hegemony and power-structure. She writes: sex is “*like a fiction, perhaps a fantasy, retroactively installed at a prelinguistic site to which there is no direct access.*” Butler would be totally right, if it were not for the fact that there is a linguistic dimension which not only underlines/underwrites sex, but, also, is not accessible through linguistic consciousness because of the foundational repression of desire for/of the m(o)ther. This incest taboo prevents/obfuscates conscious choice. Nonetheless, as she adds, this sexual fiction is central to the establishment of subjectivity and human society, which is to say that, even so, it has material effects: “*the ‘I’ neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves.*” Here Butler is right, although the “I,” as well as desire, emerges after the sublation/repression of/for the m(o)ther desire. Since, as Lacan has shown, this linguistic construction, injunction, and imperative is not too stable, it needs constant re-enforcement: myths and foundational narratives, as Lévi-Strauss’ sentence “*Il faut des rites*” epitomizes and explains—hence the cruel *sexuation* rituals and practices, laws, rules, taboos and regulations ... In order to re-establish boundaries, these “foundational stories” ground the repetitive performative acts that mark us as one sex or another, with the help of abjection (Julia Kristeva). What Butler forgets to add is that “sex” is unveiled not only as an artificial norm but, in the same move, it is also re-veiled as such. Like the phallus (signifier of the lack), which, in order to “work,” has to be veiled, sex can only work under cover. If there are no artifice, there is no sex. Sex is not conscious of its own genesis.

Contrary to what Butler argues, sexual normativity has a very limited latency for play or change; it is not really subject to change, unless one suppresses the incest taboo and if one opens up all the bodily orifices to the notion of penetration and exploration (something alluded to in Monique Wittig’s *Le Corps Lesbien* (*The Lesbian Body*) where the lover’s gaze makes love to her partner’s body from the inside through a sort of bodily invagination (in Wittig’s novel, both

lovers are women). This spectral/specular love-making abolishing the inside/outside barrier is something that only women's *jouissance* (as "Not-All") can accomplish since it can relate to the signifier of the Other; it is not limited by the "All" of phallic *jouissance*. A man, in order to do the same thing as Wittig's lover, would have to have no access to the "All"—that is to be a psychotic.

The problem with such an "amorous move" is that it turns depth into a surface, bringing it up to the outside in order to be penetrated by the gaze, body-parts and objects of introspection. This internalization and penetration of the outside gaze is, by the way, the foundational principle of modern medicine, as Foucault explained in *The Birth of the Clinic*. This medical gaze is autonomized and takes on the fetish-like quality of partial objects such as scalpel, hands and gaze. They function in unison in order to bring the bodily depth to the surface, as if skin and inside-flesh form a sort of continuous, twisted ribbon (à la J.F. Lyotard with his "*grand ephemeral pellicle/skin*" concept) strangely similar in many aspects to the Mobius loop used by Lacan's clinical pedagogy to visualize the consciousness-language-unconscious continuity and rupture.

Butler's project as well as the LBGTQ+'s intentions of deconstructing/destroying binary genders, while exposing the heterosexual matrix by citing the arbitrariness of sexual binary-laws in order to displace the effect of its necessity, fall short of their intended agenda, which is ultimate liberation.

If generalized, these practices will end up de-genitalizing sex and privileging any surface or turning depth into an outside surface available for/suitable to the projection of desire (from body skin to car body). As with the Transformer Toys, the inside/outside opposition is turned into a surface streamlined for the imposition/application of the flow of the continuous morphing of desire operated by neo-capital, bringing surplus-value on par with surplus-enjoyment (*jouissance*). 10

Zizek, quoting Lecercle, is right on target and on the money:

*"Normalcy starts to lose its hold. The regularities start to loosen. This loosening of normalcy is part of capitalism's dynamic. It's not a simple liberation. It's capitalism's own form of power. It's no longer disciplinary institutional power that defines everything, it's capitalisms' power to produce variety—because markets get saturated. Produce variety and you produce a niche market. The oddest of affective tendencies are okay—as long as they pay. Capitalism starts intensifying or diversifying affect, but only in order to extract surplus-value. It hijack affect in order to intensify profit potential. It literally valorizes affect. The capitalist logic of surplus-value production starts to take over the relational field of resistance to identity and predictable paths."*11

What the two preceding speculative tendencies of biological sex and performative sex seem to conveniently (?) forget or decidedly ignore is four main facts obeying two directional fluxes: language and the unconscious.

Language exists before babies: humans are born into a world of language predating their birth (names, family culture and structures, etc.) and it takes at least 5 years of daily practice via total



immersion before one is able to master key linguistic concepts automatically. One is born into a (family/social) narrative one tries to adopt, modify, makes one's own, use as spring-board, or as a guillotine...

Generally humans do not make love (or mate to use the poor words chosen by cognitivists and evolutionary biologists) to their siblings/ parents, etc. The laws of marriage and intermarriage have been strictly codified by culture in a diachronic and synchronic mode (Lévi-Strauss and Co.).

These marriage laws and behavioral gender-codes are the results of the foundational incest-taboo which rests at the origin of the culture/nature divide typical of humanity. The incest taboo is universal and without exceptions—except for the Gods, or God-like individuals (The Pharaohs).

These aforementioned facts have induced/favored in the human psyche and mind, an unprecedented development of the fantasy-dimension (what Lacan calls the Imaginary) based on the “unknown reality” of the unconscious (direct by-product of the incest taboo). That is to say that one does not make love to the other without passing by an Other, or what takes its place, informed/deformed/reformed/perverted/inverted/diverted... by one's desire and fantasies. The one who wants to be absorbed by, or absorb, a two, always goes through a three. The body of our desire is not necessarily the actual body of the other: it can be his/her body, his/her fantasized body, the body of another while making love to “one's usual other.” One can also make love to the imagined/fantasized body of what one thought/imagined our mother or father wanted: the fantasized, unconscious image-body of the father's or mother's desire which then can correspond to the same body-gender as one's own (homosexuality)—something reduplicated in male homosexuality by the refusal of the boy's symbolic castration by the father, or the refusal of the symbolic seduction by the father in the case of lesbianism. This inter-relation, or attempt at, is always governed by an absent/present dimension of the fantasmatic body, of impossible body of the primeval other, which Freud calls “*Das Ding*.” This repressed presence/absence is itself re-configured by the Law, the interjection/interdiction of the Big Other (the *name-of-the-father*), i.e. the other (we should write the *f(O)ther*), of the primeval, maternal other (lost object of unicity and primary identity) whose presence and dimension forbids the fusion with, or return to the m(o) ther. One makes love with one's mind via one's body through a third instance, which can be the body or the (hyper-virtual) image of another, or mental, fantasy picture or another—something commodification and commercialism has known to capitalize upon for maximum profit. In sex the loop mind/body is primary and always implies an absent but secretly present Other (unconscious). This is why Lacan says that between the human sexes, the sexual relation does not exist, but *ex-sists*. Its laws have been written somewhere else by someone else (the Other of the unconscious), producing unconscious sexual structures—what Lacan calls *sexuation*.

Notes

1 This article is dedicated to the nomad/homeless intellectual Biodun Iginla, ex-director of the University of Minnesota Press, who experienced “gender troubles” by using the woman bathroom in the *Break Espresso* café, Spring 2013, in downtown Missoula, Montana. He



received a police citation and became persona non grata at the café.

2 *If you say what you like, you will hear what you don't like.* (Terence in *Andria*, *Phormio*, and *Eunuchus*; quoted by Saint Jérôme in *Against Rufinus*.) That is to say, one has to take responsibility for the construction of the message one sends and the meanings which may be thereof enclosed (although one cannot be responsible for or foreclosed meaning), for, as Lacan said in the famous Seminar on *The Purloined Letter* (in *The Purloined Poe*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), a letter always arrives at its destination.

3 University of Montana Newspaper, *Montana Kaimin* Volume CXVI. Issue 36. *Transitions in a world of uncertainty: transgender conference highlights health care* (Madelyn Beck).

4 Lacan. *Séminaire 20: Encore*. Seuil: Paris, 1975. Two Sessions were translated by Jacqueline Rose in *Feminine Sexuality*.

5 Jean Baudrillard. *Fragments: Cool Memories II, 1990-1995*. Verso: London, 1997. 141

6 Mimi Marinucci. *Feminism is Queer: The Intimate Connection between Queer and Feminist Theory*. London: Zed Books: London, 2010. 234

7 Jean Baudrillard. *Politics: A Plea for Cultural Revolution in Organ Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*. Routledge: London, 2004. 183, 184.

8 Jean Baudrillard. *Fragments: Cool Memories II, 1990-1995*. Verso: London, 1997. 117

9 Jean Baudrillard. *Fragments: Cool Memories II, 1990-1995*. Verso: London, 1997. 95, 96

10 Michel Valentin. *The Centennial Review*. Winter 1992. Volume XXXVI No. 2. 1992.

11 Brian Massumi. *Navigating Moments in Hope*, edited by Mary Zournazi. Routledge: New-York, 2002. 224