

Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository

---

4-7-2020 3:30 PM

## The Psyche and Gender as a Multiplicity

Jessica N. Ellis, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Professor Helen Fielding, *The University of Western Ontario*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in  
Theory and Criticism

© Jessica N. Ellis 2020

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd>

---

### Recommended Citation

Ellis, Jessica N., "The Psyche and Gender as a Multiplicity" (2020). *Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository*. 6976.

<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/6976>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact [wlsadmin@uwo.ca](mailto:wlsadmin@uwo.ca).

## Abstract

Gender appears “unlocatable” because it is not a property of biology. At best, it is widely considered a “social construction” reinforced through institutional norms. This thesis contends that the underlying reason there is such difficulty in theorizing gender constitution is because much of Western philosophy is prefaced on an unrealizable contradiction. The subject is assumed to be constituted by multiple factors such as one’s biology as well as the influence of society. Such a multiplicitous constitution, however, cannot be expressed within an individualistic psyche. The work of Marx is predominately appealed to in order to explain traits of the individual psyche. In order to make sense of the way in which gender is multiply-constituted, the psyche must be theorized instead as multiply-constituted as well. Rather than presenting the psyche as individualistic, it is represented within these chapters as a collectivity. After consideration of what a potential psyche construed as a multiplicity may look like through the work of thinkers Mikhail Bakhtin and Luce Irigaray, it is easier to see where the confusion with constitution rests. The psyche is made up of our own thoughts, but these are traceable to the material world and others. The psyche is thus always a collectivity, not something closed-off from the influence of others. The multiple factors that are said to constitute gender are able to be traced through this new model of the psyche. This thesis concludes that gender is therefore not a mysterious property of an individual. Rather, different identities manifest as different types of embodied subjectivities, some of which share traits. This gives the illusion that there are immutable categories of gender identity.

## Keywords

Gender, multiplicity, consciousness, Irigaray, Marx, Bakhtin, Lacan, commodity, narrative, dialogism

## Summary for Lay Audience

Gender is an elusive concept that cannot be pointed to as it lacks a strict biological origin. Sociologists and gender theorists have argued that gender is reinforced by certain social institutions that assume gender is binary—that there are only male and female genders. The interior component to the constitution of gender has been lacking in analyses because it is a very complicated topic. This thesis looks at the ways in which language and our thoughts play a part in the establishment of gender identity. A model of the psyche that is more expansive is proposed to help explain gender identity. This model expresses the psyche as a collectivity, rather than that of a sole individual, in order to show the way multiple influences bear upon and compose identity. This research also relies on the stories of transgender folk to confirm there are more than two genders. By expanding the model of the psyche, one is able to show that gender is multi-faceted in its constitution and it is not a mysterious property. The practical purpose of this research is to help legitimize the presence of LGBTQ2S+ identities by establishing a theory that academically accounts for the plethora of gender identities in today's society.

# Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Keywords.....	ii
Summary for Lay Audience.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
Introduction.....	vii
1 The Singular Psyche.....	
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 The Self-Referent Subject and Capitalism.....	2
1.3 The Self as an Object in the Mirror Stage.....	10
1.4 Women As Private Property.....	14
1.5 Conclusion.....	27
1.6 Bibliography.....	28
2 The Psyche as a Multiplicity.....	
2.1 Introduction.....	30
2.2 Binary Trans Subjects.....	31
2.3 Trans-narratives:Trans Subjects as Multiplicities.....	37
2.4 Bakhtin and the Materiality of Trans-narratives.....	46
2.5 Diagnosis and Conclusion.....	50
2.6 Bibliography.....	55
3 Gender as a Multiplicity.....	
3.1 Introduction.....	56
3.2 Gender as a Property?.....	57
3.3 Dialogical Theory and the Psyche.....	59
3.4 Sharing the World.....	64

3.5 Conclusion .....	67
3.6 Bibliography .....	69
Conclusion .....	70
Curriculum Vitae .....	73

## Introduction

This thesis navigates through implications following from the lack of attention to a multiply-constituted exploration of subjectivity within analyses of gender constitution. This lack of attention lends itself to a tension within gender theory. Such theory seeks to explore the multiple influences of the socio-cultural on gender constitution, yet cannot productively reconcile these influences within a subject that is individualistic. One's gender identity is hardly construed as intersubjectively or multiply-constituted despite the knowledge that the psyche does not emerge in isolation. Due to this knowledge, I think it would be productive to construe the subject (and psyche) as a collectivity in order that we may better theorize gender as a concept that is multiply-constituted.

The capitalist subject is problematized in chapter one. It is found that industrial capitalism promotes a singular individual as opposed to a collective subject. Further, such a subject construction maintains a binary understanding of gender and thus cannot speak to the presence of other gender identities. This construction occurs as a result of the embodied human organism turning into an *individual human* who becomes increasingly oriented toward the possession of objects. The objects are seen as belonging to one's self; they become a part of identity constitution. A new psyche emerges through this shift which I term self-reference. One begins to think of not just objects, but the self as its own object and turns inward in pursuit. Women are often excluded from this individualism, however, because she does not partake in the same mechanisms of patriarchal production. Through an engagement with the work of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Luce Irigaray, this chapter demonstrates just how the establishment of the capitalist individual has affected gender theory. It advances a notion of the self that becomes empty as it is oriented toward the pursuit of objects. It turns away from development and exploration of meaningful inner psychic life through encounters with the world outside the self.

The second chapter proposes that performativity theory is haunted by the spectre of individualism and thus also inadvertently advances a binary understanding of gender. The lack of attention to exploring consciousness further impedes thinking of the subject as a multiplicity. I turn to trans scholar Jay Prosser's theory of trans-narratives to focus the discussion on the interiority of the psyche. His project shows how narrative and the body co-

constitute a transsexual psyche. I complicate Prosser's narrative analysis with Bakhtin's dialogical theory to demonstrate how narrative and consciousness are co-constitutive. Narrative (language) can be traced through our encounters with others, so consciousness (influenced through language transmission) is always a collectivity. This lends itself to a model of a psyche that is therefore capable of internally accounting for its multiple influences.

Chapter three elaborates further on the Bakhtinian analysis through the introduction of the later work of Luce Irigaray. She cogently offers a theory of the subject that refers to encounters with others for its constitution. I argue that this can replace a subject construction that is self-referent. This new subject is therefore not individualistic. This sentiment is echoed by Bakhtin's dialogism where encounters co-constitutes consciousness. Irigaray augments his work by providing a gendered reading of the encounter. The final chapter therefore serves as an attempt at a formulation of a new subject construction that is a multiplicity. This new subject is a collection of its influences and encounters with others, not an individual. It is, moreover, able to express gender as a multiplicity because it boasts a model of the psyche that is a collectivity able to trace its constitutive influences. I maintain that this rendition yields positive outcomes for especially marginalized gender identities, elaborated in the conclusion.



# The Singular Psyche

## 1.1 Introduction

In order to make the case that it is worth exploring the psyche as some sort of multiplicity to better understand the multiplicity of gender constitution, the case must first be made that the psyche is not already substantially theorized in this manner. An enduring assumption persists within everyday Western life that one's psyche is home to one's consciousness. This seems to evince the general marked absence of accepted representations of the psyche that point to any sort of collective consciousness. Through normative assumptions, it can be gathered that the psyche is individuated, which is to say singular, in its constitution. By singular I mean not a collective. Most philosophical and scientific theories prefer to frame the subject in this way rather than explore other iterations. Such theories further influence the institutional and cultural conventions of society with the effect of reinforcing this as the dominant assumption.

I take this assumption of singularity to be an outgrowth of what I term self-reference. The process of division or split that happens internally in the psyche once one begins to think about themselves. It is the process by which one begins to think of themselves as their own object of thought. Thinking of the self in this way means that this self is represented as not more than one. When one objectifies the self into a concept to be ruminated upon, it is a single concept, not a collection of concepts. When I think of myself, I think of a self that is one person, not a self that is made up of many people. This process is, I argue, a large reason why there is an illusion that the constitution of the self is a singular entity. In this chapter I argue that the self-referring subject is a masculine subject grounded in capitalist mechanisms of object formation. This subject construction establishes a binary understanding of gender that is in fact predicated on singularity and not multiplicity. To further elucidate the concept of self-reference and how it encourages a view of singular psychic constitution, I invoke the lens' of three distinct thinkers: Karl Marx, Jacques Lacan, and Luce Irigaray to be explored in their respective sections.

## 1.2 The Self-Referent Subject and Capitalism

A new type of psyche emerged during the advent of industrial capitalism. The turn to rapid production marked a new preoccupation with ideations of attaining objects of personal property to gain wealth and thus power.<sup>1</sup> This desire for personal accumulation was to ensure protection against an impoverished life. Marx describes the new psychical orientation as “abstract individualism”. After looking closely at his articulation, I found one overwhelming feature. The description of the psyche conveys attributes of self-reference, which again means thinking of the self as an object. Taking up the *1844 Manuscripts* as a serious foray into psychology, this section aims to unpack Marx’s analysis of how the human psyche became altered to represent such attributes given the arrival of industrial capitalism.

The transition to a new type of psyche prompted by the emerging economic epoch pivots around what Marx sees as the transition from the animalistic crude senses of man to the civilized *human* [emphasis Marx’s] senses. In addition to the regular five senses such as taste, touch, smell, sight, and hearing, he argues that there are mental or practical senses as well. Some examples of these are to love, to will, to have, and to use.<sup>2</sup> In the manuscripts Marx only specifically brings attention to the two mental senses of having and using. They become incredibly important in the discussion of how the individual psyche transmutes under capitalism. In terms of their importance in helping to manifest a capitalist society, they eclipse the other senses. Marx explains, “An object is only ours when we have it—when it exists for us as capital [...] when we can use it.”<sup>3</sup> Objects solidify their power over us when we can have them and use them. Therefore, having and using become synonymous with the power of private property. When we have and use an object, it gains power over us.

---

<sup>1</sup> The words objects and private property are used interchangeably here as they are in the manuscript chapter to which I refer.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts and the Communist Manifesto*, Trans. by Martin Milligan (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), 108.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

Part of the way objects gain power over us through the senses of having and using is the way these senses manipulate the sense-organs of the body. The five basic senses attribute their functioning to the sense-organs from which they are provoked. For example, the sense of hearing uses the organs of the ears to function. Yet, these five senses become subjected to the demands of the two practical senses, and begin to work in the latter's service. This suggests the basic senses of the body become oriented toward the more abstract thinking senses based in the psyche. The functioning of the senses become increasingly abstract. They become oriented to the practical senses which serve ideations of having and using private property and away from their original purpose that serves the animal. The basic senses now serve the animal in captivity—in a more developed civilization. This mutates the organism, says Marx, away from being a human animal, into a *human* individual.

Marx provides an example of this transition of the senses from organism to *human*. To begin, it is necessary to note that the basic senses of the organism are “caught up in crude practical need and [have] only a *restricted* sense.”<sup>4</sup> For example, crude eyesight would see a gemstone and think it is shiny and pleasing to the eye. It would see the object, and take it in as its immediate form. The capitalist dealer in minerals, however, “sees only the mercantile value but not the beauty and the unique nature of the mineral.”<sup>5</sup> The dealer's sight is oriented away from the brute facts of the mineral, toward the abstract power this gem may offer within the capitalist system. Of course there are cases where one can see with both the restricted sense, and the abstract sense. The point of the example is to simply mark the distinction between how one would see a mineral if the senses were not oriented toward the practical senses(needs) of the *human* individual.

The basic senses take on an abstract function that serves the psyche of the new human under capitalism. Marx explains, “the senses have become directly in their

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

practice *theoreticians*. They relate themselves to the *thing* for the sake of the thing, but the thing itself is an *objective human* relation to itself and to man, and vice versa. Need or enjoyment have consequently lost their *egotistical* nature, and nature has lost its mere *utility* by use becoming *human use*.”<sup>6</sup> This is difficult to unpack. It means the senses have become theorists in a sense, that they have become things that reflect concepts of thinking. So the basic vision for example can relate itself to the thing (it sees for the sake of merely seeing) but that thing comes to represent something more than what it is under capitalism. The thing serves a function in capitalism. The basic visual sense no longer sees crudely, but sees in relation to what the thing it is seeing is under capitalism. The basic senses reflect the relation of humans to their world at the time. They no longer serve pure forms of animality such as pleasure or pain.

The orientation toward private property thus engages the entire human form in its project; the body and the mind are mutually embroiled in the affair. It follows that the entire body is engaged in the project of capitalism, not just one’s thoughts. The economic system is not just a logic that operates independently outside the humans as a theoretical construct. The system becomes part of the whole human living apparatus, their organs and redirects their function:

Man appropriates his total essence in a total manner, that is to say, as a whole man. Each of his human relations to the world—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, being aware, sensing, wanting, acting, loving—in short, all the organs of his individual being, like those organs which are directly social in their form, are in their *objective* orientation or in their *orientation to the object*, the appropriation of that object, the appropriation of the *human world*; their orientation to the object is the *manifestation of the human world*.<sup>7</sup>

The mutation of the senses demonstrates alienation of the individual. Alienation is one of the concepts Marx consistently deploys throughout his work to illuminate the ways in which humans have become estranged from their inclinations as an organism.

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 106.

The senses become oriented towards the demands of private property and objects, and away from the basic needs of the human. Since all the senses become alienated from their original purpose in the service of the pre-industrial capitalist organism, the human as an entirety becomes alienated. The functions which began as a means to further the basic reproduction of the species, now serve ideations of private property. These and the practical senses now engage the entire totality of the corporeal body and psyche of the human in this project of wanting and using private property. These senses are now in the service of a *human* abstract world.

The alienation of the body and its sense-organs has its correlate in how the psyche is alienated. The psyche becomes alienated when it no longer strikes a balance between what Marx calls general consciousness and species consciousness. The former is what one would describe as the individuated personal consciousness each person has. Put simply, one's ability to think. Yet as much as man is a particularity, he is a particularity of an entire species. The *human* represents the totality that represents "the subjective existence of thought and experienced society present for itself; just as he exists also in the real world as the awareness and the real enjoyment of social existence, and as the totality of human life-activity."<sup>8</sup> Species consciousness is the awareness that one is part of something greater than the individual. Under capitalism, however, the individual consciousness becomes more pronounced and estranges us from species consciousness. Marx says:

My *general* consciousness is only the *theoretical* shape of that of which the *living* shape is the *real* community, the social fabric, although at the present day *general* consciousness is an abstraction from real life and as such antagonistically confronts it. Consequently, too, the activity of my general consciousness, as an activity is my *theoretical* existence as a social being.<sup>9</sup>

The individuals' practical need for private property overrides the needs of the species. This situation is reflected in the antagonism between the two types of consciousness.

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Even the most basic need of the species is overridden by the needs of the *human*. This is to say that even reproduction becomes humanized. The institution of marriage comes to represent the meaning of reproduction and therefore the tenants of capitalist ideology.<sup>10</sup> Species consciousness and the crude need for the species to reproduce is increasingly replaced with more individually-inclined values.

When the crude interests of the species are overtaken by the particular, this heralds the birth of individualism. This term denotes the preoccupation of the *human* with the particulars' needs, not the needs of the greater species. Put another way, the *human* senses encourage the expression of individuality rather than the crude needs of the species such as brute reproduction of the collective. Individuality is promoted through the attainment of private property. These objects build up a sense of self for the individual. The self is bolstered through the objects by which one stands opposed. Marx elaborates, "That all objects become for him the *objectification of himself*, become objects which confirm and realize his individuality, become *his* objects: that is, *man himself* becomes the object."<sup>11</sup> Perceiving via the mutated sense-organs, the *human* does not see objects as they would normally appear, he sees them through the capitalist lens. The objects thus become a reflection of himself and promote his sense of individuality.<sup>12</sup>

The alienation of the individual from its collective nature prompts the individual to begin to treat others as objects because the sense-organs have been mutated to interpret things in relation to attainment of private property. People, as they stand externally to the self, can become objects and one may appropriate them as objects to express one's individuality.<sup>13</sup> The object, "being the direct embodiment of his individuality, is

---

<sup>10</sup> See the following section of this chapter for more.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>12</sup> Marx uses "he" not just as a sign of the times in which only men were considered subjects of history. He also uses it because he makes an argument that women are excluded from labour, so his discussions of the individual under capitalism are usually relegated to the experience of the male psyche.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

simultaneously his own existence for the other man, the existence of the other man, and that existence for him.”<sup>14</sup> Each person relates to one another as objects. This becomes more obvious when we turn later in the chapter to the relationship between man and women under capitalism espoused by Luce Irigaray. The product of social interactions is estranged. There are no direct expressions of sociality because organismic sociality is now in the service of the individual needs, not the needs of the species. Humans are social creatures, this is part of how we communicate and further the reproduction of the species. This is not to say that only reproduction of the species is important. More specifically, what is at stake is the life lived other than the one where the social is made into an abstract. Nature, and our role as animals in it becomes abstract. Moreover, “nature became man for him.”<sup>15</sup> Other fellow human organisms are part of nature, and we treat them as objects that reflect our individualism.

Humans have not just a general consciousness but what I would call an individualistically-oriented consciousness. This arises not just from a transmutation of the senses but through the production of language as a social product of labour. One key difference between humans and animals is that the former are labourers. They produce the means of their own subsistence. Marx states, “By producing food, man indirectly produces his material life itself.”<sup>16</sup> The production of food is the first step toward production of other means of life. The way in which life expresses itself through production is a “mode of life.” He further says, “What they are, therefore, coincides with what they produce, with *what* they produce and *how* they produce. The nature of individuals thus depend on the material conditions which determine their production.”<sup>17</sup> The mode of life for humans is capitalist production and therefore all products express

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>16</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The German Ideology,” in Karl Marx: Selected Writings, ed. Lawrence H. Simon (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994), 107.

<sup>17</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The German Ideology,” 108.

that mode of life. Language thus expresses the capitalist mode of production according to this line of reasoning.

Labour is not just the production of material products but linguistic and conscious products as well. Marx and Engels explain: “The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is directly interwoven with the material activity and the material relationships of men; it is the language of actual life.”<sup>18</sup> Ideas and intellectual productions such as politics, morality, religion, metaphysics, take on the capitalist mode as well. Language and consciousness are intellectual products, but they are social, which means they are materially produced. Language is the material representation of consciousness. Marx and Engels state language “is practical consciousness which exists also for other men and hence exists for me personally as well.”<sup>19</sup> Language is consciousness turned out and made manifest in the real world through dialogue and communication; it is a social product. The body, and its sense-organs give rise to linguistic expression. This illustrates the corporeal aspect behind language, its practicality. The body is able to express conscious thought through language because there is a link between the body and consciousness in Marx’s work. This is his incredibly important idea that through the body that is always labouring (doing), consciousness is transformed. The body is part of nature and nature is transformed and worked on by people, this transforms culture and history. Further, because man is the particular representation of history, he transforms himself at the same time he transforms nature. Moreover, “Thinking and being are thus no doubt distinct, but at the same time they are in unity with each other.”<sup>20</sup>

Since the mode of life of capitalism is to produce private property, language and consciousness are oriented toward that effect. Since the body is alienated from its animal inclinations, this alienation finds its way into language. An example of this is the way we look at the I or noun as separate from the properties with which it is described like

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>20</sup> Marx, *1844 Manuscripts*, 105.



actions done by the body. This leaves us to wonder what an “I” is on its own. This problem of language encourages a separation of the psyche and body. After reviewing the information in this section, it hopefully becomes possible to see that part of the reason this “disembodied I” is prevalent in language is because of the influence of individualism on language. Marx shows that the *human* as part of its history, mirrors the socio-economic climate of the times. This means the language we use is also a product of current history.

Since the individual is preoccupied with private property in society, it follows that language reflects this. I maintain that the noun-predicate relation in language is a way to express the individual’s relationship to property. It is an articulation of language (grammar) and consciousness that express the mode of capitalist life. The sense-organs that give rise to expressions of language are mutated under capitalism, just like other organs of the body. The organs express not just their bare life activity of communicating, but execute a certain style unique to the capitalist epoch. The organs of language, in the service of the practical senses of having and wanting, expresses the ideations of the individual. The organs become theoreticians that express the relationship between properties and the individual. The “I” exists only by virtue of what it has as predicate properties. This is mirror to the individual who establishes the self through private property. I only am established by virtue of those objects by which I stand opposed. In the chapter of the manuscripts entitled “Estranged Labour” Marx also explains that consciousness becomes more alienated the more objects one owns.<sup>21</sup> The “unfortunate” grammar setup of the “I” that does the body expresses alienated consciousness because it signifies how the psyche has become abstract from the body. The subject in language is an iteration and has the same features of the subject under capitalism and reciprocally reinforce individualism. Both iterations do not theorize the subject as a collective, but as a disembodied entity that is only made manifest by virtue of properties.

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 74–84.

The work of Marx has contributed greatly to the directive of this chapter's argument that the psyche is self-referential. The individual's preoccupation with attaining property objects and turning the self into an object in this process, exemplifies the concept of self-reference. The senses and psyche (which consist of language and consciousness) move away from animal species inclinations towards abstraction and individuality. The territory covered thus far has been difficult, but important to parse because I believe part of what has impeded theory from asserting that subjects may be collectivities is the infiltration of self-reference. When this thesis implements the word individual from now on, it therefore connotes a specific type of psyche under the influence of capitalism, not simply a reference to any nonspecific person. This psychology does not serve the needs of the species as the greater species' needs are no longer part of what constitutes self-identity. The psyche is oriented toward thinking about the single individual self, not a collectivity of others. Finally, the psyche does not think of itself as a collection of others. Under capitalism, the human animal turns into an abstract *human* individual with a model of consciousness and language that evinces its individuality as opposed to a possible multiplicity.

### 1.3 The Self as an Object in the Mirror Stage

Lacan takes a different approach to explain how the psyche is self-referent meaning how the psyche thinks about itself as its own object of thought. He employs a psychoanalytic lens to describe when a child first sees their image in a mirror. This is called "The Mirror Stage"(hereafter referred to as TMS) and pre-dates a child's exposure to the capitalism system. This stage illustrates how the child sees the self as an object in the mirror. This provokes the child to think about what they see from the point of view of how others may see them. This move takes the child out of its immediate sense-perception and into the abstract ideations of itself as an object.

The mirror stage is the first time in a child's life, usually beginning from between six to eighteen months where upon looking into the mirror at the reflection, the child first recognizes the relationship between gesture and image. But more than this, the child, "playfully experiences the relationship between the movements made in the image and

the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it duplicates—namely the child’s own body, and the persons and even things around him.”<sup>22</sup> For Lacan, this is a gestalt moment, meaning it is the image which prompts this formative and lasting effect on the psyche, not discourse or social influence. The child, according to Lacan, manifests “the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as a subject.”<sup>23</sup> This stage establishes the ego subject before it is influenced by the social through language.

In TMS the child does not just see the self, but assumes it or takes it up as one’s own and begins to form a mental reality that is abstracted from the material body. This bodily-psycho transformation that occurs is called the ideal “I”.<sup>24</sup> The child’s relationship with this image or “imago” creates a fictitious virtual reality in which control over the image may be gained. The child does not just see the self in the mirror, but inaugurates a new psycho orientation that allows for the child to see the self as others see them. This means for the first time, the self is posited as an object.

The new mental position, creates a split subjectivity in the child. It is when *je and moi* become recognizable. Lacan explains “The I, of which I can only be seemingly aware in an immediate sense, emerges only in a spatial distance that is at the same time a self-distance.”<sup>25</sup> The “I” as a concept emerges in relation to the other. As the child gains independence, the perception of the self is no longer fused with that of the mother. The “I” is experienced immediately through consciousness, but also understands it is now a “me”, an entity distinct from others. The child uses the word “me” to point to the self

---

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2006), 75.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Bettina Schmitz and Julia Jansen, “Homelessness or Symbolic Castration? Subjectivity, Language Acquisition, and Sociality in Julia Kristeva and Jacques Lacan,” *Hypatia* 20, no 2 (2005): 73.

when in relation to others. It is now possible for the child to consider their separate identity as its own object of thought as “me”.

Lacan believes TMS is a gestalt position, meaning it occurs before the child enters into the Symbolic, which for Lacan means the language and structures of society. Bettina Schmitz and Julia Jansen remind the Lacanian reader of a criticism made by Lilli Gast. Gast points out the tendency in Lacan’s explanation of TMS to neglect the importance of the symbolic. This becomes a serious weakness in his account. Not only is TMS always already embedded in the Symbolic but also it can only occur because the existing symbolic framework is mediated via a specific person.<sup>26</sup> To explain, the child in TMS is small enough that it still needs to be held by the mother; it is not independently standing in front of the mirror. This implicates the child in a system of familial relations that are predicated on the laws of society that govern that family and how they interact. It is the presence and body of the mother that makes the new relationship between the “I” and “me” possible.<sup>27</sup> TMS is not really a “primordial” position.

The witnessing of the ego ideal (the self perceived as if the other were perceiving it) represents what Lacan calls the “objet petit a” or the small object of desire. This object is unattainable, however, since it is not represented by a real thing. In the case of the child, the unattainable object of desire is to know how the other views him or her. This is the instance of the subject becoming split. It is thus a desire for the other enacted through the self, or how one perceives their self-image. Identity is constructed through the mental representations provoked by the mirror. Lacan states, “It is this moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge into mediatization through desire of the other.”<sup>28</sup> He means that all attempts at knowledge-making from this point on are mediated through this projection of the self as the other. Anything unknown to us is symbolized by the *objet petit a*. We can never know what the other thinks of course, so everything we think

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* 5.

becomes a projection of our own self. This operates too on the mechanism of self-reference. So part of becoming a subject, moreover, is becoming a subject for the other's desire. Put another way, becoming a subject is positing the self as an object (for the other) and thus seeing the self as an object; to think about the self as an object of one's thoughts.

The *objet petit a* only assumes its function as a consequence of "symbolic castration." This is juxtaposed with Freudian castration. Rather than being an unconscious threat to lose the phallus, symbolic castration denotes the change in the child caused by subjection to entrance into the new socio-symbolic world. This new world forces the child into a place of dependence upon foreign objects and signifiers. The castration felt by the symbolic is the basis for the lack felt by the small child. This occurs before sexual development and thus before the Oedipal drama which foments Freud's definition of castration.

The splitting of the subject—the realization that I exist as me and yet also for the other—and the move to unify through the object of desire, signals the first call towards a mastery over the self. Unification is a desire to heal the split. Yet, this unification will always fail since it is prefaced on repression of the body. The ideal "I" is what identifies with aspects of society, or at least tries to because it is an instance of when one tries to see the self as others do. In doing so, the ego must construct a body that can be continuously repressed to represent this ideal. The individual thus chooses to repress its mere organismic inclinations, (chooses alienation from the body) in order to live in a mental virtual reality created by the demands of society.<sup>29</sup> The mental reality is the fixation on thinking of the self as an object. The child realizes it must begin to repress its basic baby instincts in order to psychologically develop into an independent being detached from the mother; to grow up is to become alienated. The search to unify is the tension between an ideal world of ideations of the Other and one's instincts. The search is unrealizable, however, because despite the attempts at repression of the body, the object of this drive is mental and cannot be fulfilled. The object cannot be realized or obtained

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 78.

because it cannot exist in the form of an object like how hunger can be obtained through the object of food when it is directly consumed. The unification of the self is therefore sought through the attainment of “little” objects that represent the desire; a continuous search of fulfillment and unification through mental representations.

The desire for unification mirrors the practical sense of having and wanting espoused in the *1844 Manuscripts*. One could argue that the search for private property of the individual is an instantiation of the drive to unification. After all, the individual in both Marx and Lacan is alienated from bodily inclinations to become oriented toward a world of abstraction. The desire to attain private property could be linked to the primordial drive to seek fulfillment through objects. This position also accepts Gast’s criticism that the small child is already implemented in the Symbolic, which would include institutions of capitalism.

Both theorists maintain that an individual is mentally divided and must be made whole again through the consideration of objects in order to participate in society. In Marx these objects can be private property objects or people when they are considered to be objects. The psyche, construed by both theorists, is constituted through a self-referent mechanism apparent in their critiques of the human subject. Both theories suggest the individual may consider his or herself as an object split off from its “I” as it considers the self in relation to other objects. Standing in opposition to these objects, the self is able to break off and become self-referent. Moreover, the self can consider itself as its own object of thought due to the realization that it is in fact an object standing opposed to other objects.

## 1.4 Woman as Private Property

The previous two sections offer male perspectives regarding how the psyche is what I call self-referent, but a feminist reading of this mechanism is also necessary. It is my view that women cannot have the same self-referential psyche feature as men. Women are excluded from obtaining private property in the same ways, so their self-identity cannot be established through objects. Especially while Marx was writing,

women were not in the labour force and did not have as much access to owning property. Irigaray argues that women are actually considered private property (objects) under capitalism. She says “Marx’s analysis of commodities as the elementary form of capitalist wealth can thus be understood as an interpretation of the status of woman in so-called patriarchal societies.”<sup>30</sup> Following from this, I maintain that women cannot have the same type of psyche as men under capitalism.<sup>31</sup> Her existence cannot be established through the preoccupation of obtaining objects because she *is* an object.

The “incest taboo,” notes Butler and Irigaray, is the beginning of the treatment of women as property.<sup>32</sup> The exchange of women according to this rule is foundational to the socio-economic system and cultural order. Irigaray explains, “Men, or groups of men, circulate women among themselves, according to a rule known as the incest taboo.”<sup>33</sup> Woman must be brought from outside to help ensure against procreation within a family. Irigaray argues that deep polygamous tendencies in men exist.<sup>34</sup> Marx calls these tendencies “communal lust.” These temptations are countered by the reality that the entire future of the family lineage rests on the search for a specific suitable woman to guard against the taboo of incest. Women are therefore considered scarce commodities because although there are almost equal numbers of men to women in society, only some of the women are considered desirable.<sup>35</sup> The desirable qualities of women include, but

---

<sup>30</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) 172.

<sup>31</sup> In this chapter woman is defined as lacking a subject position. Irigaray refers to the feminine sex rather than gender because she views the body as an important aspect to gender constitution. For the purposes of this thesis, the specificities of the difference between sex and gender will not be considered. It is only important to note that both the feminine sex and woman as concepts, represent one half of the binary.

<sup>32</sup> See pages 103–4 of *Gender Trouble* by Butler.

<sup>33</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 170.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

are not limited to both how well she can provide children, and the attractiveness of her physical character.

Men used to purchase women thus rendering them property. Since women are scarce and the future depends on them, then men that would purchase women from their fathers would own the most valuable commodity in society. This property, women, were often purchased through a dowry paid to the father in return for the exchange of the daughter. The mother was not paid because she was excluded from the domain of business.<sup>36</sup> Women had to take their husband's last name, essentially rendering their own family name dead unless they had brothers to pass it on if they went on to marry. This perpetuates the importance placed on providing male heirs. By taking their spouses name, women become the property of the husband. They were also not allowed to have their own private finances until well into the later mid- twentieth century. These are just a few examples of the way women have historically been culturally dissuaded from owning property while at the same time become property themselves.

The purchase of women as property became foundational to capitalism, as did their possession. Private property and its possession contribute to the constitution of the male psyche. Marx goes even further to state that the sole purpose of life under capitalism is direct possession of property.<sup>37</sup> He even explains that crude communism would not emancipate women because then "A woman becomes a piece of communal and common property."<sup>38</sup> By crude communism it is meant that wages are universalized, thus giving the illusion that there is equality in society between the classes. Unfortunately, society would not become equal if this were the case because other problematic mechanisms would stay in place, such as the exclusion of women. Crude communism is differentiated from Marx's theory of socialism. which calls for the emancipation of the worker through an uprooting of the problematic mechanisms of capitalism.

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>37</sup> Marx, *1844 Manuscripts*, 100.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.



Women are the original property of society created by men and they are also excluded from creating their own private property objects. This again reveals that the role of women is not to be included in business. It is not just that women are treated as property, but that they also do not get to create in the market. Since the creation of objects is part of the formation of culture, women are excluded from culture-making as well. Products, according to Irigaray are designed by and for men. Additionally, they are only exchanged among men. Since men create the cultural products and are able to exchange them, society is produced in the image of men's needs. Irigaray expands on this crucial point by stating "The law that orders our society is the exclusive valorization of men's needs/desires, of exchanges among men."<sup>39</sup> Not just property, but the social relations, and language are made in his image. This becomes so pronounced that it could be called a law of society.

Of course it should be noted that times have changed since Irigaray wrote. Attitudes toward marriage traditions have shifted, women have increasingly become part of the workforce and despite wage gaps, have been able to have access to various degrees of financial independence. Yet, the important point to consider, and one which highlights the depth of Irigaray's criticality, is that inclusion is not a solution for the emancipation of women. Even while women become exchangers on the market like their male counterparts, they may be reinforcing a culture with a foundation prefaced on their exclusion and treatment as property. The culture that women join is still man's image since it is still a mirror of him. This continues to enforce ideals counter to her own needs and desires that depart from those of men. Thus even as a participant in the capitalist patriarchy, she is still property. The male is still using her as property to prop up his own self-identity. Further, Marx has demonstrated that men treat others in his image—as objects. Just because a woman joins the workforce does not make her any less an object. She is now perhaps doubly-objectified. She is firstly a woman navigating institutions and

---

<sup>39</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 171.

laws that exploit her. Secondly, she is a fellow worker whom her male counterpart still sees as an object in order to realize his own individuality.

Not only does exclusion and attempts at participation in the market confirm her social reality as an object, but the religious order does as well. The organization of society from the symbolic system of the “name of the father, the name of God—contain in a nuclear form the developments that Marx defines as characteristic of a capitalist regime [...] the division of labor among private producer-owners who exchange their women-commodities among themselves.”<sup>40</sup> Religion, law, family, state, science, art, morality all fall under the general laws of private property.<sup>41</sup> In addition to this, the Christian religion encourages individualism because its dictums support an intense focus on the amelioration of the self. It is less surprising then that capitalism, growing alongside the religion of the times, would embrace these tenants as well.

It appears that women’s status as property would stay the same even if the religious order became defunct. According to Marx, atheism is not enough to escape the patriarchy; it is not enough to emancipate women. Atheism is a concept that has little to do with critique of the economic system. Even if everyone ceased to follow religion, this would not rid us of the oppression women face by virtue of the socio-economic system. It is changing the economy that would yield concrete changes in the material world. Marx explains “Religious estrangement as such occurs only in the realm of consciousness, of man’s inner life, but economic estrangement is that of real life.”<sup>42</sup> Atheism is merely a belief in the resistance to religion. It is not, however, a transformation of society. On the other hand, socialism is capable of actually transforming society. This is because “It proceeds from the *practically* and *theoretically* sensuous consciousness of man and of

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Marx, *1844 Manuscripts*, 103.

nature as the *essence*.”<sup>43</sup> From a theoretical and practical standpoint, socialism provides a way to structure changes. It proceeds from how theory connects to sensuous reality. It removes the alienation of humans, which contributes to the ideations of private property that cause individuality and objectification. Since atheism is a mere lack of belief, not a study of socio-economics (able to transform the individual) it does not affect the material world.

Women are not just a property, they are a commodity.<sup>44</sup> This is a more specific definition of property espoused by Marx, which refers to specific features the property has on the market. Irigaray embarks on a full discussion of how Marx’s analysis of the value of commodities seems to mirror the social status of women. Commodities have use-values which is their value according to how they are used. For women this includes, as previously mentioned, their desirability and ability to reproduce the workforce. Commodities also take two forms: a physical form and a value-form. The value-form is unattainable, however, as it is unable to be grasped in its physicality. The value-form only appears when commodities enter into exchange, which is to say if there are more than one. When exchange occurs, an external “third term” of measurement appears by virtue of this interaction.<sup>45</sup> Women, argues Irigaray, only find value when they are confronted by another woman-commodity. “The fact that it[*she*] is worth more or less [to men] is not its own doing but comes from that to which it may be equivalent.”<sup>46</sup> Her value is not based on what she can be or do as an individual, but how she is measured against her fellow female property-objects. The competition between women to gain the favour of men is reinforced through this system. Since men are the owners of the means of production, then her value comes from the ability to fulfill male needs (through her use-values) better than other women; this is how a woman gains her value.

---

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>44</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 173.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

The constitution of the psyche is different in woman because of the relegation to the status of property. In regards to our discussion of the self-referent psyche in this chapter, there is a key feature of her commodification that shows she cannot have this same psyche. Being a woman, her position in life is to become a domestic wife. So in order to become this she must be a valuable property. Her psyche is thus oriented toward the needs of men to increase her worth. Instead of working toward the discovery of what her own psyche may look like, women are dissuaded. To ensure one has the means to survive in society (a man), women may need to focus on becoming a property with value. Thus it is not really a full choice to orient towards the needs of men, for vulnerable and lower-class women especially, it can be a life or death situation. Moreover, a woman's quality of life may depend upon how well she can be an object. With the lack of financial independence and hegemonic exclusion from business as odds against her, women often need to focus on attaining a man to help support her through life.

As a commodity, she cannot see a reflection of herself in society the way men can. She is reflected in no objects, institutions, or general laws of the socio-economic order. Her essence as a woman is lost. Her psyche is not made through objects the way man's is because she cannot attain them or produce them in her image. Irigaray explains, "In other words, for the commodity, there is no mirror that copies it so that it may be at once itself and its "own" reflection."<sup>47</sup> What would be her expression of herself is fetishized, just like how labour is fetishized in the private property. The true history of an object is fetishized and its existence is represented only as what it represents on the market. One cannot see the labour that went into making an object. The object should represent the specificities of what went into its making, but instead it represents a contrived value. Each object is different because it was made at different times, perhaps by different people. Yet, the objects' actual existence, or history, is obfuscated by its mere use-value and exchange-value. The interiority of the object, its reality, is not what it represents to society. As with women, "It is thus not as "women" that they are

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

exchanged, but as women reduced to some common feature.”<sup>48</sup> What a woman is, is not known and this is why Irigaray refers to her as “awoman”.

Since a woman’s psyche is not made up of objects to establish herself, it is estranged. Private property is an expression of alienated human life. She is private property, so she is estranged. She is alienated from what her own identity would be in society if she were allowed the same power as men. Since she is a need and object for man, she becomes part of his nature. She begins to reflect him, and not herself. Irigaray argues “Commodities thus share in the cult of the father, and never stop striving to resemble, to copy, the one who is his representative.”<sup>49</sup> The commodity attains a “supernatural” form when its material form is met with a metaphysical form of value. A divide arises where it has a social value and a physicality, but these two cannot compliment each other. Put another way, the social value is not a value of its own nature, it is the nature fabricated to fit the needs of man. The commodity is estranged from its own natural form as it takes on greater meaning in society, but this meaning does not reflect its own history.

An example of her estrangement is her lost relationship to her sexuality, which has been co-opted to serve the needs of men. She is relegated to the three roles of virgin, mother, or whore, each with different use-values for men. Irigaray mentions another type of value called natural value. She explains “As both natural value and use value, mothers cannot circulate in the form of commodities without threatening the very existence of the social order [...] Their responsibility is to maintain the social order without intervening so as to change it.”<sup>50</sup> Mothers are actually so important to men, that they are foundational to society. The child-rearing and domestic duties allow men to partake in business. The

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 185.

virgin, however, is pure exchange-value.<sup>51</sup> This is because she represents the “ideal” abstract fabrication of the mind that represents possibility, not the materiality reality. She represents an envelop or an empty vessel for men’s ideas. Once she is no longer a virgin, she is demoted to use-value, she is no longer the abstract standard by which women are compared. The prostitute has sexual use-value but no exchange-value. For Irigaray, “prostitution amounts to usage that is exchanged,” because the women’s use-value has already been used.<sup>52</sup>

Her psyche cannot be made up of objects because it is “liquid” in contrast to the “rational” solidity of the male psyche.<sup>53</sup> Her psyche is not made up of objects like men’s because it has a fluid character. This fluidity is a metaphor to illustrate her estrangement from herself and her society. Her psyche represents a slippage into liquids, not representation by solids. Solids, that have definite boundaries, definable formation and stable, visible existences in space represent rationality and logic. Liquids are a metaphor for “irrationality” because liquid is unstable, has permeable boundaries, and can change form. The slippage of liquids shows how she is in tension with her call to be a mirror to men (to mime their needs) and her identification as something else truer to her unknown and unstable essence within the patriarchy of capitalism. Her essence is not known because she does not know herself outside of the domination of men. Her psyche is unknown in solid terms as it cannot be represented by those features because they historically belong to the male psychic constitution.

I have argued thus far that men identify with themselves through the objects through which they are constituted, but women cannot. Men are able to see property as objects in reference to their self, and other men and women as objects. Women are not able to have this psychological position. Objects and people do not mirror her needs in society, so she slips somewhere else. Irigaray explains the slippage: “All this is feasible

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 107.

by virtue of her “fluid” character, which has deprived her of all possibility of identity with herself within such a logic”<sup>54</sup> Even in language men are able to constitute themselves through property. The “I” is built up through the predicate properties of language. The self-property relation mirrors the “I” pronoun-predicate relation. In each case, the subject is established through the objects by which it stands opposed. If this relation did not exist then there would be no subject. Or more specifically, the relation would represent a different type of subject such as women.

Language is a mode of production from the general law of capital, and represents the logic of solids. Women, however, do not identify as this speaking subject because her psyche is not built up of properties. Her speaking position is *other*. Irigaray explains “And yet that women-thing speaks. But not “like,” not “the *same*,” not “identical with itself” nor to any, etc. Not a “subject,” unless transformed by phallogocriticism (the logic of solids, see next page). It speaks “fluid.”<sup>55</sup> In the section on Marx the practicality of language made possible through consciousness and the body, was discussed. It becomes clear now that since a woman’s psyche is ostensibly *bankrupt* within the frame of the logic of solids, her ability to express herself in the same way as men is fraught. Though of course a conscious thinking being, her ability to express herself through language that represents the male psyche and its features, is a struggle.

Irigaray has done a service to feminism by detailing the ways in which this struggle for expression is wrongfully seen as mental illness that should be punishable or seen as pure pathology. The ways women communicate seem irrational and illogical when in fact it is often a symptom of a greater systemic issue throughout modern history of women’s frustration navigating masculine institutions and laws that do not represent women’s needs or desires. I would like to draw the reader to her words which reframe stereotypical hysteria as a power and potentiality (of women’s misunderstood psychology):

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 111.

A power that is always already repressed, by virtue of the *subordination* of feminine desire to phallograticism; a power constrained to silence and mimicry, owing to the submission of the “perceptible,” of “matter,” to the intelligible and its discourse. Which occasions “pathological” effects. And in hysteria there is at the same time the possibility of another mode of “production,” notably gestural and lingual; but that is maintained in latency. Perhaps as a cultural reserve yet to come...?<sup>56</sup>

Phallograticism is the name given by Irigaray to the way the logic of solids becomes hegemonic. The logic is passed through the laws and institutions of society giving it power over women. An example of how this logic is passed, is the way psychoanalysis implements the logic of solids and how this oppresses the feminine subject. The root of the word refers to the phallus because this organ is implicated in the logic of solids. The idea of symbolic castration in psychoanalysis is the backbone to why psychoanalysis becomes phallogratic. This castration symbolizes the fear of a man losing the phallus, and the subsequent fear of the lack of one. The anxiety surrounding the fear of castration represents the logic of solids because it mirrors the desire to be whole or unified—to be solid. An economy of castration is an economy of lack, of privation. It is one in which fear of loss (of the phallus) plays a predominant function.

In the logic of castration, the exclusive sense of the logic of either/or is given predominance. Value is attached to one object (the phallus) and its lack is perceived as valueless. This binary also denotes the relationship between man and women where one is valued and the other is seen as lacking the same value [unless it can mimic].<sup>57</sup> The binary functions as this divider and symbol of value in the gender difference distinguishing boys from girls. Absence of the phallus means absence of value, since according to this logic everything hinges on the possession and use of this organ. The phallus acquires a much broader significance than the bodily organ would have on its own. It becomes, at the level of meaning, the phallus (in Lacanian theory, the phallic

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>57</sup> Ofelia Schutte, “Irigaray on the Problem of Subjectivity,” *Hypatia* 6, no 2 (1991): 70.



signifier). The phallus comes to symbolize value, limit, measure, authority, the law.<sup>58</sup> If we return to Marx, it is possible to say that the phallus has surpassed its animalistic function. It now represents the *human* desire to think of the self in a certain way.

Irigaray levies phallogocriticism as a critique against Lacan's mirror stage. She believes the concept deploys a masculine perspective that does not represent women. Women cannot be reflected back in the mirror. Irigaray further writes that the female imaginary is "those components of the mirror that cannot reflect themselves back."<sup>59</sup> In other words, she is the components of what the mirror is made of, what is fetishized. She is what is unseen, but what is still there. Knowledge of the self, for men, is projected through a projection of the very self whereas knowledge for a woman is something else. Even though TMS is geared toward the understanding of very young children, the theory itself comes from a place that upholds a binary between what is seen and unseen in the mirror. The *objet petit a* represents a transformation of fluid to solid.<sup>60</sup> Lacanian psychoanalysis seeks to take what is unseen in the mirror and make it into a search for unification. It is the resistance to fluid character that women is actually "a woman" not true to her self because her economy of fluidity is not recognized by psychoanalytic science's dependence on solids.<sup>61</sup>

Ellie Ragland-Sullivan argues that Irigaray's critique of TMS conflates the mirror stage with the fixing of sexual identity through castration anxiety, which occurs later on in the child's life. The argument continues, suggesting that Irigaray should not use anything to do with the phallus to critique the stage because the idea of castration as an event has not yet happened yet in the child's life. A consequence of the critique through

---

<sup>58</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 173.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 113

<sup>61</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 114.

the phallus is that “Irigaray reduces this stage to the literal and biological.”<sup>62</sup> The gestalt mirror stage occurs during the six- to eighteen- month mirror-stage and the phallic fixing of sexual identity occurs after this.<sup>63</sup> I see the basis for the criticism but it should be noted that Irigaray is invoking the phallus as a way to critique the methodology of psychoanalysis. The *objet petit a* as part of the method of Lacan, represents the phallic economy. The phallic economy is a by-product of castration anxiety. The mirror stage is inspired by the same theory prefaced on solids as castration anxiety.

She further critiques Irigaray writing that “By failing to see that the phallic signifier is intrinsically neutral, meaningless in its own right, and only takes its power from associations catalyzed in the Oedipal drama, Irigaray does not understand that Lacan is describing first causes, not approving them.”<sup>64</sup> The phallus is not, according to Irigaray, neutral as a concept. Further, the phallus is not taken literally, it is symbolic of how psychoanalysis, is able to represent a male theoretical perspective. Such a perspective cannot describe a woman so the first cause is not neutral. Rather, it is a theory created by a male psychoanalyst and thus a projection of his desire to implement the economy of solids. It is important to reiterate that when feminists speak about the use of the phallus in psychoanalysis, these are not banal criticisms. They are complicated interventions into the canon, not essentialist and literal reduction to appendages.

Since the exclusion and estrangement of women is the foundation for men being able to do business, it can be said that becoming *human*, which is to become male, is simultaneously the becoming of commodities for women.<sup>65</sup> Man makes society in his image and sees others as needs (objects). Society and people become mirrors of himself. Women are supposed to mirror the desires of men back at them. She is supposed to be a

---

<sup>62</sup> Ellie, Ragland-Sullivan, “Jacques Lacan: Feminism and the Problem of Gender Identity.” *SubStance* 11, no. 3 (1982): 11.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Karl Marx, *1844 Manuscripts*, 101.

man through reflecting his desires, and yet at the same time be a woman. She cannot be a man and treat others as needs or make society in her image as she is not represented by the logic of solids. Yet, she also does not know what a woman is because she is treated as an object, and the contents of objects are fetishized and unknown. She is not able to explore her interiority, or subjectivity. Her exchange brings value to men, but moreover, she is surplus-value for him. The capital man gains is at the expense of woman. Further, the psychological position he inhabits, is due to and based upon a system that exploits women. She is not a self-referent individual under capitalism because she is a woman, and is *other*. She is not the subject represented by capitalism so the psychic constitution that developed from this position does not describe her. Since her psyche is not the same, it could be a multiplicity. Chapter three discusses this possibility.

## 1.5 Conclusion

I have made a case in this chapter hoping to elucidate why the psyche operates on the concept, or I suppose mechanism of self-reference. This attempt comes as a response to the realization that the psyche, and thus consciousness are not theorized as collectivities in gender theory. After rumination, I propose that a potential reason for this is that the psyche thinks about itself in relation to itself, not a collective. Such features of this type of individual are carried through the modes of production (owned by men) and thus come to be represented in culture such as philosophical thought. Lacanian psychoanalysis is one such way individualistic thought became represented in culture. This theory, displays aspects of self-reference and abstraction espoused by Marx. The psyche is split in that it considers itself an object and then tries to unify through consideration of said object(s) like the individual under capitalism. The individual thinks about objects in relation to the self instead of the collective in relation to the self.

The given assumption that consciousness and the self are singular in their essence, developed from masculine cultural production that champions individuality. The next chapter will really work to disrupt this assumption about consciousness. Jay Prosser and Mikhail Bakhtin's work will demonstrate how a subject may be constituted through collectivity as opposed to individuality and abstraction. This will help construct a

collective subject, as opposed to a self-referent one. And again, all of this is crucial because I believe we need a new polyvalent subject in order to talk about the multiplicity of gender constitution.

## Bibliography

- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40, no.4 (1988): 519–531.
- Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which is Not One*. Translated by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits*. Translated by Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006.
- . *Seminar VI: Desire and its Interpretation*, 20th session, 13 May 1959.
- Mark, Karl. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts and the Communist Manifesto*. Translated by Martin Milligan. New York: Prometheus Books, 1988.
- . and Friedrich Engels, "The German Ideology," in Karl Marx: Selected Writings, ed. Lawrence H. Simon. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994.
- Ragland-Sullivan, Ellie. "Jacques Lacan: Feminism and the Problem of Gender Identity." *SubStance* 11, no. 3 (1982): 6–20.
- Schutte, Ofelia. "Irigaray on the Problem of Subjectivity." *Hypatia* 6, no. 2 (1991): 64–76.
- Schmitz, Bettina and Julia Jansen, "Homelessness or Symbolic Castration? Subjectivity, Language Acquisition, and Sociality in Julia Kristeva and Jacques Lacan." *Hypatia* 20, no. 2 (2005): 69–87.

## The Psyche as a Multiplicity

### 2.1 Introduction

In order to show how gender is multiply-constituted, it is necessary to show how the psyche is multiply-constituted as well. In this chapter I argue that transgender perspectives are able to demonstrate such a multiplicitous constitution of the psyche. Conversely, binary constructions of the subject are based upon the popular Western cultural assumption that there are only two genders: male or female. Such an assumption further maintains that gender is traceable to one's biological sex at birth.<sup>66</sup> Other identities such as: transsexual, nonbinary, androgynous, or someone in transition between genders cannot be meaningfully represented through such a viewpoint. It would therefore be more constructive to theorize the psyche of non-cisgender folk as a multiplicity rather than binary. Trans scholar Jay Prosser's theory of trans-narratives gives an account of how the psyche of transsexual folk can be construed to represent a multiplicity.

Section one explains Prosser's criticism of the portion of performativity theory which references drag culture. Performativity, a notable theory of gender constitution by Judith Butler, ultimately seems to frame the trans subject in binary terms nonspecific to trans embodied experience.<sup>67</sup> Trans-narratives are proposed in section two as a more appropriate model for expressing the trans psyche. Literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope, which proposes another way to analyze narratives, will be read in section three alongside trans-narratives to bolster Prosser's account. Section four concludes with a provocation of the importance of accounting for the psyche as a multiplicity for diagnostic criteria of non-cisgender folk seeking therapeutic support.

---

<sup>66</sup> This type of gender identification is called cisgender or cissexual.

<sup>67</sup> By trans embodied experience it is meant that trans people may have a unique experience of relating to their body in a different manner than heterosexual-cisgender people.

## 2.2 Binary Trans Subjects

Performativity theory lacks a robust account of the constitution of transgender identity. While Butler never suggested her work could speak specifically to such constitution, the issue is that it inevitably did in fact come to represent the constitution of many gender orientations.<sup>68</sup> Due to the influence of Butler's formidable text *Gender Trouble*, the constitution of transgender identity is now often read through the lens of a queer (not specifically trans) theorist. This is even more problematic given that the exact meaning of the terms 'queer' and 'queer theory' are contested and in continuous movement. In order to remedy this situation, Prosser takes up the task of critiquing performativity from his female-to-male trans perspective.<sup>69</sup> He argues that Butler's engagement with gender forecloses trans subjectivity because her rendering of the subject ultimately emerges as a product of restrictive binaries. These binaries preclude thinking of the subjectivity of trans people where and/both sides of these binaries may be present thus allowing for the psyche to be a more open multiplicity. Further, these binaries reflect a distinctly queer and disembodied perspective that cannot speak to the specificities of embodied trans experience. The binaries that are upheld through performativity theory, according to Prosser, are: male/female, homosexual/heterosexual, literal/de-literal bodies, and subversive/hegemonic.

The homosexual/heterosexual binary follows from the establishment of the male/female binary.<sup>70</sup> The latter is set up by Butler through an explanation of the "incest taboo." Though there are obvious biological differences between men and women, the "incest taboo" marks the socio-cultural difference between the two genders. As discussed in the previous chapter, this taboo refers to the way in which men have historically gone outside of their own family to procure a female mate. The result of this is the

---

<sup>68</sup> Jay Prosser, *Second Skins* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 24.

<sup>69</sup> In this chapter performativity is not discussed broadly but rather the focus is on several very specific aspects of the portion of the theory dealing with drag. that directly relate to criticisms levied by Prosser.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

continuation of the male namesake and lineage. The difference between men and women, then, is that one is commodified as a resource to be exchanged while the other holds the power to exchange. Only men and women are genders of concern when it comes to this scenario because heterosexual coupling ensures the procreation and thus continuation of the human species. This taboo encourages the cultural erasure of other gender identities that do not procreate or build families in the same heterosexual manner. It stands to reason, then, that the male/female binary is a necessary precursor to the heterosexual/homosexual binary. Since trans folk do not procreate according to typical heterosexual dictates, they are read as homosexual-queer.

The queer reading of trans people encourages a binary of literalized/de-literalized body. Prosser traces this back to Butler's analysis of "heterosexual melancholia."<sup>71</sup> In this reading it is argued that the literal body (the physical sex organs) come to represent one's desire for an other sex. This would coincide with a heterosexual subject. The "literal" phallus and vagina which cause pleasure and desire (presumably for the opposite gender) come to represent one's gender through juxtaposition. In this way one's gender and sex become conflated and further reinforce the dominance of heterosexual and cisgender culture. This assumption about genitalia also supports the general societal prohibition against homosexuality. Butler explains, "Heterosexuals who believe that their phalluses and vaginas are the "cause" of their pleasure or desire literalize them and "forget" an/other body: both the [potentially] homosexual body, the body of the other, and their own imaginary or phantasmatic body."<sup>72</sup> The homosexual body is displaced, as is the possibility of creating an imaginary other sexuality beyond the bounds of heterosexuality. Heterosexuality thus comes to signify materiality of the body and homosexuality, a disembodied forgetting. I think this analysis, explored in great detail in *Gender Trouble*, is very insightful. It unfortunately ends up propping up a hetero/homo-queer binary that leads to a de-literalized and disembodied trans subject.

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 39.



The specificities of embodied trans experience are obfuscated when trans people are strictly relegated to a homosexual-queer position. Through association with the de-literal body, transgender is read as disembodied queerness which opposes the materiality of the heterosexual-sexed body. Prosser maintains that “Queer transgender’s function in *Gender Trouble* can be summarized as twofold: to parallel the process by which heterosexuality reproduces (and reproduces itself through) binarized gender identities; and at the same time to contrast with heterosexuality’s naturalization of this process. For whereas the constructedness of straight gender [hetero-cisgender] is obscured by the veil of naturalization, queer transgender reveals, indeed, explicitly performs, its own constructedness. In other words, queer transgender serves as heterosexual gender’s subversive foil.”<sup>73</sup>

Drag performance demonstrates the subversive/hegemonic binary where queer and camp come to represent subversion. Hegemony refers to the dominant heterosexual culture. Since trans folk are relegated to a queer position, they come to represent subversion. Drag became a focal point of the “performativity” thesis.<sup>74</sup> This is because the theory is often (incorrectly) boiled down to the five paragraphs that reference drag.<sup>75</sup> The act of performative drag is employed by Butler to help explain the social construction of gender. She cites Esther Newton to explain how impersonation showcases the way in which gender is viewed as not strictly biologically innate:

At its most complex [drag] is a double inversion that says, “appearance is an illusion.” Drag says [Newton’s curious personification] “my ‘outside’ appearance is feminine, but my essence ‘inside’ [the body] is masculine.” At the same time it symbolizes the opposite inversion; “my appearance ‘outside’ [my body, my gender] is masculine but my essence ‘inside’ [myself] is feminine.”<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 103.

A concerning consequence of the linkage of drag and performativity, however, is that transgender people are overwhelmingly read as queer and subversive.<sup>77</sup> Through the juxtaposition of one's inner and outer expressions of gender, drag is seen to subvert and parody any notion that gender has a primary essence. It therefore points to gender as something that is reinforced by norms. Drag represents a retaliation to gender norms rather than a reinforcement. Although this demonstration has significance for understanding gender in a novel manner, many trans folk are not queer and/or subversive. Some feel they are very much the opposite gender and so identify with the norms which govern that gender. There are many trans people who do wish to subvert norms, and others who wish to become a part of those norms. Setting up a transgressive/hegemonic binary does not allow for and/both situations where trans people may have complicated relationship with their gender constitution.

The term "queer" becomes not just synonymous with homosexuality, but also its connotation comes to represent "a figurative for the performative—subversive signifier displacing referent."<sup>78</sup> The act of drag displaces the body as a referent. Queer cannot be located or pointed to, but rather signifies a disembodiment. A consequence of the binaries derived from Butler's queer reading, is a collapse of gender and sexuality because queerness derives from the binary between heterosexual and homosexual(queer). It is worth noting that in "Critically Queer" Butler seeks to "unstick the notion of performativity from the literal performance (external display) to which it had become fixed[in drag]."<sup>79</sup> The problem with this amendment is that the trans subject is still queered and thus disembodied because the homo/hetero binary set up early on, remains intact. A more extensive build of performativity does not negate its dependence on the homo/hetero binary.

---

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>78</sup> Jay Prosser, *Second Skins*, 32.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 34.

The queering of the trans subject contributes to an erasure of the materiality of the trans body. Materiality of the body does not exist because the psyche and body are collapsed into “one” and this does not allow the body to exist as its own distinct category of reference to be explored; the same goes for the psyche. Prosser locates this rendering of the queer subject in Butler’s reading of Freud. He argues that Butler relies upon Freud’s interpretation by pointing to a footnote in *Gender Trouble* citing a passage from *The Ego and the Id*.<sup>80</sup> Freud states, “The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego.”<sup>81</sup> The ego cannot be disentangled from the body. Butler’s de-literalization of the trans body thus “depends upon her conceiving the body as the psychic projection of a surface.”<sup>82</sup> The body is a surface to be projected upon as seen in the way the body is used as a way to project gender norms or the subversion of such norms in drag. Prosser reads Freud differently, however, and suggests that “Freud’s bodily ego is designed not to dematerialize the body into phantasmatic effect but to materialize the psyche, to argue its corporeal dependence.”<sup>83</sup>

There is a significant consequence of the psyche not being able to be treated as a distinct category separate in some sense from the body; there is no way to explore the interiority of the psyche. The separation does not imply a dualism or complete distinction of mind and body. Rather, a recognition that the psyche is significant enough that it deserves exploration on its own merit. Consciousness, as part of the psyche, for example, is a concept worth exploring apart and in conjunction with the body. Prosser maintains, conversely, that Butler focuses extensively on surfaces as a way to show how discourse permeates bodies.<sup>84</sup> He states, performativity “refigures sex from material corporeality into phantasized surface; and through this it re-inscribes the opposition between queer and heterosexual already at work in *Gender Trouble*, sustaining it by once again enlisting

---

<sup>80</sup> She cites the same passage again later in “Bodies That Matter.”

<sup>81</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 222.

<sup>82</sup> Jay Prosser, *Second Skins*, 40.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 42–43.

transgender as queer.”<sup>85</sup> The body is employed as a surface to be seen and made up in drag (boys that look like girls and girls that look like boys). In addition, “any claim to a sense of sexed interiority, any *feeling* of being sexed or gendered” is absent. Prosser notes that Freud states the bodily ego is in part derived from bodily sensations or “internal perceptions” of one’s body, though Butler does not explore this.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, in keeping it at surface-level, trans folk and how their thoughts and feelings interact with experiences from within their bodies, is left unturned.

In order to flesh out the trans subject, establishing a sense of interiority is key. This is because “What gets dropped from transgender in its queer deployment to signify subversive gender performativity is the value of the matter that often most concerns the transsexual: the *narrative* of becoming a biological man or a biological woman (as opposed to the performative of effecting one)—in brief and simple the materiality of the sexed body.”<sup>87</sup> The connection between the psyche where narratives about one’s awareness of their gender are, and the body have a connection that needs to be explored. Prosser expands:

The transsexual doesn’t necessarily *look* differently gendered but by definition *feels* differently gendered from her or his birth-assigned sex. In both its medical and its autobiographical versions, the transsexual narrative depends upon an initial crediting of this feeling as generative ground. It demands some recognition of the category of corporeal interiority (internal bodily sensations) and of its distinctiveness from that which can be seen (external surface): the difference between gender identity and sex that serves as the logic of transsexuality. This distinction is tactically, ingeniously, and rigorously refused by *Gender Trouble*.<sup>88</sup>

Butler responds to criticisms of her performativity theory by saying in her essay “Critically Queer” that “cross-gendered identification is not the exemplary paradigm for

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 19–20.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 41.

thinking about homosexuality, although it may be one.”<sup>89</sup> Here we see Butler recognize the conflation between sexuality and gender that Prosser has argued infiltrated her thinking in *Gender Trouble* and even later *Bodies That Matter*. This conflation, again, begins with the linking of the two binaries male/female(gender) and hetero/homo(sexuality). This curtails discussion of trans subjectivities that cannot be placed in such binary positions. Many trans folk may not identify as homosexual or cross-gendered and instead identify as heterosexual after transition. One year after *Second Skins* was published, Routledge released a new edition of *Gender Trouble* with an updated preface where Butler specifically thanks Prosser in a footnote for his criticism of her work.<sup>90</sup> Although performativity enabled a somewhat problematic reading of trans people, Butler extends her support of Prosser’s project. It is helpful she brings awareness to the implications of queer theory in order to show how crucial it is for trans voices to contribute to their own models of gender constitution.

## 2.3 Trans-narratives: Trans Subjects as Multiplicities

Trans-narratives express the trans psyche as a multiplicity rather than binary in order to express embodiment and interiority diminished by queer theory’s readings of trans folk.<sup>91</sup> These narratives are an expression of the relationship between a trans person’s inner thoughts, and the way these are prompted through their relationship with the materiality of their body. Trans-narratives refers to the specific analysis Prosser imparts in order to read accounts of self-reporting trans people speaking or writing about their experiences as a trans person. Usually these reports occur in autobiographies or clinical settings. The shift, given this approach, moves the focus from exploration of surfaces of a subject to interiority instead. “I read transsexual narratives,” Prosser states, “to consider how transition may be the very route to identity and bodily integrity. In transsexual accounts, transition does not shift the subject away from the embodiment of

---

<sup>89</sup> Judith Butler, “Critically Queer,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1, no. 1 (1993): 24–25.

<sup>90</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 206, footnote 7.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

sexual difference but more fully into it.”<sup>92</sup> The unique experience a trans person has, intimates a personal struggle played out in narratives of thought about the self. This yields a different psychological perspective than that of a cisgender people.<sup>93</sup> Jay Prosser, who has transitioned from female-to-male, sets forth this very argument: transsexuals can have a unique perspective derived through the struggle to be defined as a gender different than the one assigned at birth. The trans psyche therefore emerges as a distinct multiplicity inexpressible within the male/female and hetero/homosexual-queer binaries. This section explains trans-narrative readings of transsexual transitions. I argue, however, that the form of such narratives excludes understanding other types of trans identities.

Prosser maintains that trans-narratives (also referred to in the text as “body narratives”) help produce a representation of embodied transsexual subjectivity through the interplay of body and narrative. One important aim of this method is to show that the material world and flesh that it supports have an impact on the way theory presents gender. This approach is largely in response to Prosser’s criticism that gender studies inaugurates gender constitution as socially constructed and thus disembodied. Prosser also seeks to draw attention to the relationship between the psyche and gender identity, which is lacking in analyses that focus on how institutions reinforce gender norms.<sup>94</sup> The framing of narratives into autobiographical form, Prosser argues, joins the past and present within the trans person’s psyche to form a coherent subject position and thus heals the split.<sup>95</sup> Narratives help integrate the ego and material body. He notes, “The transsexual’s often declared capacity to experience his or her body as differently sexed from its materiality certainly supports Freud’s notion of a bodily ego. But, because the subject often speaks of the imaginary body as more real or more sensible, I argue that this phenomenon illustrates the materiality of the bodily ego rather than the phantasmatic

---

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> I cannot speak here to the psychology of trans children who are allowed to live as their chosen gender. Perhaps being accepted from a young age would lessen the tension felt in the psyche, especially due to earlier access to transition in appearance.

<sup>94</sup> Prosser’s criticisms of gender theory can be found in *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* by Gayle Salamon, specifically pp. 38–41.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 123.

status of the sexed body: the material reality of the imaginary and not, as Butler would have it, the imaginariness of materiality reality.”<sup>96</sup>

Prosser focuses more on the way trans-narratives frame personal accounts of trans experience to establish a trans subjectivity. He does not look deeper into the history of literary elements and the way language can be material. To further tie embodiment to narrative form the materiality of language must be considered. One must consider that story genres like autobiography are imbued with literary elements that speak to dominant epistemes of the time said genre emerged. Different types of stories render or express temporality in different ways depending on the social situation of the time period that gave rise to such ideas. Thus, language expresses more than just words. Narrative form is more than an empty container to fill—it contains a history that influenced its making and also continues to influence an individual’s thought by the way they think and put ideas together. It is a way of making sense of events, feelings, and material relation. In this way, he elides the relationship between how the body and subjectivity write and conduct each other through language. His prescient analysis, though politically and incredibly necessary for enriching the theory canon, could perhaps become an even stronger account with an expanded look at how the material world influences narrative form. This would make trans-narratives more embodied accounts because subjectivity becomes tied to materiality.

The trans-narrative subject begins as a split subject. Prosser observes the unavoidable split that occurs within the subject through the process of being one who is both at the same time enunciating and being enunciated about in the narrative process. The self-reporting subject must come to grapple with being a narrator of their first-person experience as well as organize these thoughts as part of a detached, objective third person point of view that is spoken to another. I note, however, that to narrate as part of these two perspectives creates a contradictory subject position that undermines a trans person’s claims to identity in the present. This is because transsexual subjectivity is expected to

---

<sup>96</sup> Jay Prosser, *Second Skins*, 44.

inhabit either a before or after transition position, never an open-ended prospect. Still, communicating these narratives is necessary as “autobiography is transsexuality’s proffered symptom,” because the presence of gender dysphoria is not locatable biologically.<sup>97</sup> As the recounting of personal stories are heavily relied upon for diagnosis as well as access to hormone therapies and surgeries, their proper interpretation has grave consequences for some trans people.

Trans-narrative theory describes the inherent tension within the split subject but this analysis can exclude some trans folk. Firstly, a consciousness that has always historically been, is then suddenly replaced via the act of retroactivity by another who has presumably also always existed. The “moment” where the psyche splits between these two identities is assumed to be that pivotal rift where the trajectory of the transsexual aligns with a transitional experience in the narrative. For example, when Jan Morris looks at herself in the mirror to say goodbye to her old self, this is where she also becomes (transitions) into her new self through the decision to have sexual reassignment surgery (SRS)<sup>98</sup>. This is an example of a moment when trans subjectivity is established. The creation of this “split” literary consciousness can become problematic, however, for transsexuals telling their story who do not have a such a clear Joycean epiphany about their identity. This approach perhaps may also alienate transgender people who do not seek to fully become the other gender—do not have a definite split—but perhaps still wish to learn about and explore medicalized options with support. The split consciousness advanced by Prosser begets an expectation that not every trans person can match. His work in *Second Skins* focuses specifically on transsexuals not multiple types of transgender identities.

In order to make Prosser’s trans-narratives more productive for not just transsexual narrative theory but also for understanding other types of transgender self-reports, the limitations of a split-consciousness should be questioned. I maintain that the idea of a split is theoretically too smooth for understanding trans subjectivity because it

---

<sup>97</sup> Jay Prosser, *Second Skins* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 104.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.



lends itself to a stultifying conception of time. It cannot account for trans folk who have more complicated ideas surrounding their own identity that cannot fit into the before and after framing with a pivotal moment. Prosser's work focuses on the transsexual caught between the past and present identity marked by a desire to be another sex, but it is important not to forget about other trans identities who may be at various stages of transition or do not wish to fully transition at all. It is also important to note that the word desire is lacking for there is also a sense of deep embodied realization manifesting in the psyche that one does not desire to be, but already *is* the other sex. Yet, Gordon Olga Mackenzie raises an important concern: "If it were not for [especially binary] gender oppression, transsexuals would not be likely to seek SRS."<sup>99</sup> This concern, however, must still be reconciled with members of trans communities who would still seek SRS due to a strong felt sense of gender. It is of especial necessity, moreover, to make sure that narrative temporalities do not minimize the potential for ever-evolving consciousness and open exploration of trans identity.

The Gender Movement challenges the assimilation of gender minority groups into the dominant culture, which insists upon contiguity between anatomy and lived gender.<sup>100</sup> Such groups should have the same access to services even if their stories do not fit a typical trans-narrative schema. Robert, a trans man, explains that such "hallway" dwellers do not wish to be one sex or the other and are quite comfortable in the state of "in-betweenness." Though many trans folk, including Prosser, do indeed identify with one gender, the institutionalized pressure to conform to a single gender may have the undesirable result of delegitimizing alternative gender orientations that ought to exist as viable subjectivities that engage with and perceive the world:

These doors open and shut but at the end of the day you can only open a door into the male world on one side and the female world on the other side and you've joined society on either side. But if you stay in the hallway, which I believe is much more freeing because you're not bound by either side, it's infinitely harder because you're not bound by either side and you're not belonging to either side. The hallway I think is a

---

<sup>99</sup> Patricia Elliot and Katrina Roen, "Transgenderism and the Question of Embodiment," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 4, no. 2 (1998): 240.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

wonderful place. Hallways can have windows and they can have wonderful views.<sup>101</sup>

These “hallway” subjectivities are not realized in Prosser’s trans-narratives because they are not “split” between a past and a present identity—their very identity sits comfortably in transit. The limited scope of trans-narratives becomes problematic because it also leaves out the ability to recognize the subjectivity of other possible transgender identities.<sup>102</sup> Trans-narratives are only amenable to transsexuals who see a before and after. Opening up the boundaries of trans-narratives to make space for other trans identities does not require a loss of the specificities of transsexual subjectivity; there is a unique transsexual experience Prosser offers. I merely contest that the account of embodiment in general within trans-narratives can become more robust if the idea of a “split” in subjectivity and before-and-after temporality is questioned. Moreover, this move can help us think better in terms of how autobiographies can be communicated in a theoretically strong way. More specifically, a way that maintains the integrity and accuracy of trans experience without it being diminished by oppressive literary elements.

Given the multiple identity alignments at stake, personal narratives should illuminate the multiplicity of possible identity trajectories that include staying somewhere in-between. This acceptance, however, can only be realized if the medical community gives up the desire to treat trans folk as guilty until proven innocent. Trans folk are the only group forced to prove their identity, and this pressure no doubt obfuscates their ability to communicate an accurate autobiography. As Judith Butler and others argue, this pressure manifests through the power of the medical gaze on the trans object, which must conform to fit the appropriate role to gain legitimacy. This disciplinary mechanism is at work during self-reporting practices in clinical settings.<sup>103</sup> The medical field, argues Butler, needs to take into account desires for stable identity that are crucial to realize a

---

<sup>101</sup> Sara Davidmann, “Border Trouble: photography, strategies and transsexual identities,” *Scan* 3, no. 3 (2006).

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 67.

livable life that requires various degrees of stability.<sup>104</sup> Yet, there is a double-standard for what the definition of stability requires for trans folk. It is acceptable for cisgender people to go through phases, make bad choices, have doubts and experiment with self-identity, but trans folk's choices are more rigidly interrogated simply on the basis of the fact that they were born into a sexed body that does not represent their felt gendered identity.

I take it to be a systemic form of discrimination to treat trans folk differently and to institutionalize differing expectations of such individuals within the medical community. The root of this discrimination rests in the fact that gender dysphoria is the only condition in The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) that is dealt with not by finding a cure, but by working retroactively through it by proving it exists in the first place.<sup>105</sup> Further, there is a myriad of problems with treating something that is not a disease, within the same epistemological framework that works to treat illness. Trans people are not foremost mentally ill even despite incidences of mental illness comorbidities. Those without mental disorder diagnoses in the DSM are permitted to alter appearance and behaviour based on how they feel, but this privilege is not extended to trans folk even though they are technically also outside of the realm of mental disorder. Cosmetic surgery is of especial importance here when aesthetic restructuring results in a double-standard. If gender dysphoria is outside the scope of mental illness then responses to desires for aesthetic restructuring should be handled in a similar manner for both trans and cis-gender people. This is not to say that trans folk should not receive adequate support such as counselling through transitions, it just should not take place from a standpoint of a mental illness epistemological model.

Self-reports in a clinical setting follow a linear progression with a particular *telos* in mind at the outset—a voyage with a destination. Symbols and language reminiscent of travel and finding oneself on this journey are punctuated by accepted key moments of realization like the boy who is caught wearing his mom's shoes and the girl who rejects

---

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>105</sup> Prosser, *Second Skins*, 107.

Barbie Dolls. Prosser notes, “the ‘odyssey’ is as much the writing as the life, for it is the writing that allows this scripted navigation into life.”<sup>106</sup> In this autobiographical framework, the trans-narrator is aware of the end of the story, as it is still being lived. They know they have to, by the end of the story, declare that they knew all along they were the opposite gender. This diminishes the authenticity of self-reporting. Prosser notices that this progression is not unidirectional, however, in that autobiography involves a “temporal double movement” in which the narrator reaches back into the past to propel this past through the present.<sup>107</sup>

This double movement is carefully illustrated through a vivid recounting of the see-saw personality of Dick and Renée. The past identity of Dick comes into conflict with and also at times attempts to write over the present identity of his female alter-ego Renée during a sexual encounter with a club owner who wants to see her as a gay man and not the transgender woman she is. Prosser argues that framing narrative through this temporal double movement thus has the ability to make embodied transsexual subjectivity possible in that it allows the transsexual to integrate the self, from within the body, after transition. The sex change was a deeply signifying moment for Renée, so much that even when past feelings of Dick tried to overwrite her subjectivity, she still *felt* she was now a woman.<sup>108</sup> The sex change in her body exerted influence on her thoughts. This is how the body and narrative are co-constitutive and allow for a reading of embodied trans subjectivity. This expands the example of Jan Morris because temporality is explored more as a doubling-back.

The example of Dick and Renée works well to illustrate the body narrative in action, but my contention with Prosser’s explanation is that it does not explain how self-awareness of one’s subjectivity or consciousness is produced by the body’s experience within the narrative. It explains how Jan Morris and Renée can trace their feelings as

---

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 123.

women back to a moment of self-acceptance that then changed the trajectory of their lives. His interpretation of time structured by the autobiographical return supposedly also structures the narrator's subjectivity. But he evades any real discussion of subjectivity proper other than to comment regarding the moment where the split is healed, and transsexual identity is made possible. Yet, the autobiographical framework is much more complex in its relation to the structuring of the consciousness that it frames. For Bidy Martin, bodies and psyches are never purely effects of discursive [or narratological] practices or of abstract power relations; invested with the historicity of lived experience, they also have the potential to "exert pressure" on the normalizing processes through which they are constructed.<sup>109</sup> This line of thought explains how a sex change is able to influence one's thoughts and bring about personal growth and change despite there being a historical lack of acceptance of trans people.

The body's influence on subjectivity is overdetermined by the narrative structure in which it is framed. This abstracts conscious production from the material realm. The sex change has a great impact on Renée's subjectivity, but we do not get to explore more of the constitution of her psyche beyond this and her self-narration. A productive material explanation to find the connection between how one's subjectivity actually changes from being a body in the world, is Karl Marx's materialist conception of history. This theory contends that it is through one's actions or labour, from within a body situated in history and subject to historical contingencies, that consciousness changes. Marx maintains, "While man works on nature and changes it, he simultaneously changes his own nature. He develops the potencies slumbering in it, and subjects the play of its powers to his own sway."<sup>110</sup> Human labour or activity is the conscious exercise of our power over nature, and through this embodied position, we are affected by nature, just as much as we affect it ourselves.

---

<sup>109</sup> Patricia Elliot and Katrina Roen, "Transgenderism and the Question of Embodiment," 236.

<sup>110</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1990), 283.

## 2.4 Bakhtin and the Materiality of Trans-narratives

The contributions of literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin augment the forgoing Marxist claims to materiality of body and consciousness. His work focuses not just on the material world and consciousness, but how the connection between these two makes its way into expressions of thought such as language and literature. More specifically, Bakhtin offers literary theory and philosophy a richer view of the connection between the material world, and time-space in various literary genres within which he worked. For him, time and space are not two distinct realms that can be studied in isolation. Bakhtin calls this spatio-temporal configuration of the individual within each genre the chronotope (time-space).<sup>111</sup> The chronotope marks the inseparability of time and space. It refers to “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature.” The chronotope is constitutive of the specific ways time and space are rendered in each genre given the preoccupations of said genre. Further, each genre is influenced by its historical context. It distinctively moulds its characters in a way according to the typical emotions, situations, and values of that narrative type. Thus the different stylings of time and space organize bodies, which create spaces for the development of distinguishable types of literary consciousness. The chronotope gives the reader a way to analyze not just the events of a story, but the way identity is made by the spatio-material world of the story’s genre.

The trans-narrative is conflicted in that it is stuck between two genres: the epic and the novel. The epic, is a form of the past where such identities are not malleable. The specifics of the genre form homogenize individual personality/identity. At the same time is also reaching toward the dynamism of novel where characters are free to develop in a variety of ways. The problem with autobiography as a means to account for split subjectivity, is that the subject is not only split between two subjectivities, but between two narrative styles or literary genres, the “epic” and the “novel” which influence the construction of the subject in different ways depending on how each genre organizes its

---

<sup>111</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist. (Austin: UTP, 1981), 85.

elements within the chronotope. The subjectivity of the character of the epic, for example, is the hero who follows a specific plot trajectory. The classic “Iliad” is an example of the epic genre and Fyodor Dostoevsky’s characters showcase the emergence of the novel genre. The character of the novel, however, as a more open-ended representation, is able to interrogate the consciousness-building and breaking of its characters in a dynamic way. The novel’s character development is redefined constantly as there is no overdetermined or generic trajectory for a novel’s characters to follow. It is more open-ended. Trans-narrative subjectivity, I argue, appears to be caught between assuming the role of the hero in the epic—dominated by the authority of the past—and the flexibility and transgressions of a character developing and interrogating its own thoughts within the novel.

The epic represents a character subjectivity that is trapped in the past, whereas the novel’s character is bound up in the present state of immediate self-consciousness, a voice reflecting upon the self and events. The epic is detached from all self-conscious experience because the form of the genre takes precedence, it is unchangeable and lacks dynamism. Further, this genre operates from a distance rather than an autobiographical or self-narration perspective; the form affirms an authority of the past over the present. History—“ancestors”, “memory”, “first” and “beginning”—is valued more than one’s present. Such valorization renders the epic a closed-off genre or finalized form. In addition, the epic marks the past as sacred and no present character is able to question this authority by enacting a double-voice that questions events as they unfold. The character’s feelings (consciousness) has no place in this genre. Bakhtin explains, “In ancient literature it is memory, and not knowledge, that serves as the source and power for the creative impulse.”<sup>112</sup> The Iliad is a prime example of the theme of nostalgia, memory, and a valorization of the state. Trans folk are caught in the trappings of the epic’s pervasive influence on discourse as the pressure of the past, not the present, becomes the source of knowledge over and above present personal experience. Memory

---

<sup>112</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist. (Austin: UTP, 1981) 15.

and personal history is interrogated more value is put on proving their present identity based on the authority of the past to back up these present claims. Temporality in this sense is focused on past events. More than this, the temporality of the epic is the time-space of the world of the patriarchal social structures of “fathers” and is “thus separated from other classes by a distance that is almost epic.”<sup>113</sup> The authority of the medical system to insist on the past as truth is one example why expanding analysis of narrative temporality is an important step towards smashing the hegemony of the patriarchy. Narratives are not just fixtures of liberal arts departments, or pretty strings of words in a book, they impart themselves and have real influence on life.

Bakhtin analyzes multiple types of novels and they all share a defining trait that continuously comes into conflict with the epic. The defining trait of the genre is that it forsakes the past as the source of knowledge and shifts emphasis back to the present. Bakhtin argues, “To portray an event on the same time-and-value plane as oneself and one’s contemporaries (and an event that is therefore based on personal experience and thought) is to undertake a radical revolution, and to step out of the world of epic into the world of the novel.”<sup>114</sup> I believe the novel of “adventure-time” represents the closest style guide to how trans folk report their personal history. This style contains a more linear conception of time and comes into conflict with the demands of the epic whose sole authority is the past. In this form, the sequence of events becomes tied to the progression of the character’s journey. Put another way, events are able to change the character’s thoughts and feelings as the story progresses. Experience and knowledge become the driving force behind this genre, not the authoritative demands of the form such as tradition.

The autobiography as a whole contains a contest between two competing genres and authorities over the individual. The pressure manifests in a lack of authenticity at times where the form of the epic takes over and minimizes the strength of the conviction

---

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 14.



of the present voice. The result is the pressure for trans folk to have to manipulate their stories to straddle both genres. Memory (epic) is given precedence as identity must be proved through the past, and this account is given more consideration than the trans folk's present account (novel) of the current thoughts and feelings surrounding their identity (that may go against authority).

An important aspect to consider when analyzing the novel and narratives is that self-consciousness or the inner voice of the character, did not always exist. For example, the ancient Roman voice represented the state and tradition. It was public, oral and it is only later that the reflective, questioning inner monologue emerged, and then was transposed into literary form. The novel is able to make use of the turn in public to private discourse, yet there is always tension between the two because one's public voice is oriented toward the state and its institutions while the inner private voice is able to question and find their own truth without fear of reprisal. The novel voice is politically important because it historically gives a voice to question and potentially change the form. It gives the authority back to the character, which is important as trans people should have authority over their own narratives because they are the main character in their autobiographies. The emphasis in medical contexts should not be on trans people to prove their identity through the authority of the past, but to shift the value of narrative towards the present. Following from these observations, it becomes clearer that there is not simply a doubling-back of time, as Prosser argues, but that time figures individuals differently within its scope depending on how the story is organized by the teller. The temporality of "split" consciousness that a transsexual experiences is perhaps a split that can be healed by looking at the ways narrative form influences the authorship of self-expression. Trans subjectivity, in this way, could be established in a more robust format.

## 2.5 Diagnosis and Conclusion

My hopes in drawing attention to the way narrative is framed and influenced by the chronotope is to show that the Epic mirrors the clinical gaze. This affects how non-cisgender folk are treated in clinical settings. The gaze and the drive for the trans person to become an authority of their own produces issues that could be remedied through more

careful attention to what influences narrative style. The distance of the sterilized medicalized interpretation conflicts with and gravitates away from elements of the novel, which can account more for variegated interpretations of conscious development (think of the hyper-developed consciousness of the characters in classic novels like Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*). Hilary Malatino argues that trans-narratives may fall victim to the problems of the guest lecture in that they remain ignorant to epistemological concerns.<sup>115</sup> It should be noted here that by trans-narratives she does not mean specifically Prosser's trans-narratives framework of analysis but a broader sense of self-reporting by various trans individuals. She explains:

I stay away from conventional (that is, triumphal) coming-out narratives that conclude with individualized banalities about the importance of being true to one's self and finding self-fulfillment, happiness, or some other dangling existential carrot. Instead, I utilize texts in which the autobiographical elements are interwoven with meditations on phenomena like institutional exclusion, the trouble with the medicalization of gender, the experience of being marked for social death, or the technoscientific developments that have shaped the contemporary terrain of gender transition.<sup>116</sup>

Malatino seems to be describing ethnographical writings here. The issue with these is perhaps that trans folk unaware of the influence of discourse on self-reporting would have no way of knowing that they ought to weave their story through such a critical framework. The coming-out tropes are reproduced because they are accepted and common. To question them is to potentially lose access to therapy and/or treatment. I agree with Malatino that traditional narratives are fraught with problematic elements. This is why the authority of narrative structure itself must be called into question. Questions must be asked like: why are some ways of telling stories more accepted than others? And by who?

---

<sup>115</sup> Hilary Malatino, "Pedagogies of Becoming," *TSQ Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (2015): 398.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

Another limitation of the ethnological approach is that it does not look deeply into how class affects linguistic choice or what is really behind the words people use. As hermeneutical tools, sociological methods such as ethnography are quite limited. Moreover, there are problems with assuming that ethnography and not literary theory can comprehend the value of what Bakhtin calls “speech-genres.” His theory of such genres sets in motion, “the internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day.”<sup>117</sup> Speech-genres thus represent the socio-cultural aspects of the chronotope and illuminate the way the specificities of language are worked reciprocally through narrative and the body organized within spatio-temporality. This is an important point to mark as “The separation of style and language from the question of genre has been largely responsible for a situation in which only individual and period-bound overtones of a text are the privileged subjects of study, while its basic social tone is ignored.”<sup>118</sup>

Prosser arguably focuses more on the overtones of style in his analysis of the autobiographies. The framing of temporality takes precedence over the meaning behind the words trans folk choose, as an example. The specific language, inaugurated through the chronotope, communicates the body’s spatio-temporal relationship with the social and the consciousnesses of the character is made by and makes the story because of this; the climate of the time each genre was instantiated, manifests itself throughout such respective elements of each genre. Each narrative style is thus imbued with a social character that is fetishized, by Prosser in this case, by our focus on language as abstracted from the construction of literary subjectivity. To account for embodied subjectivity requires an analysis of language that recognizes the constraints associated with certain

---

<sup>117</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981), 262–3.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

narrative tendencies. Speech-genres, and the chronotope to which they belong, account for such tendencies.

Preserving the significance of narrative analysis is important to Prosser as it allows a space for trans subjectivity to emerge. His argument is largely a response in resistance to the overvaluation of technology or certain interpretations of performativity as establishing trans subjectivity.<sup>119</sup> His project is fascinating, but the subtext of his argument is problematic in that it assumes subjectivity can have an identity trajectory at the outset, and that this can then be traced through narrative. Even though transsexual subjectivity is certainly split, implementing a before and after temporality limits the narrative analysis. This position may also alienate trans people who do not yet know what their true identity is, are still writing and want to continue to write their story. The problem is that the form limits the possibility for an open-ended sense of identity because it pre-emptively expects an “after.” I think the form should always reflect an openness, especially with trans people who are underexposed to trans culture, or have never met a trans person before, and so do not know how to navigate potential crises of identity and gender dysphoria. Children especially run the risk of not understanding their feelings about their identity. Some trans folk only know something is “off,” try to figure it out, and this can include crossing, maintaining a variety of sexual orientations—things that can work against them or would have to be omitted if a typical trans-narrative were attempted that relies on a before/after schema.

The unedited “raw footage” of the personal narrative often conflicts with literary tropes and needs to be inherently accepted as possibly chaotic, and full of mistakes. The internalized double-voice of self-conscious narrative opposed to the finalization of the epic, allows for continuous regeneration of meaning and becoming.<sup>120</sup> After all, it would be abnormal to assume people are born knowing exactly who they will be. Rather than trying to use narrative to heal a split, splits should be seen as integral to human

---

<sup>119</sup> Prosser, *Second Skins*, 133.

<sup>120</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 324.

experience, part of the dynamism of narrative form. Splits and breaks should form the basis for a possibly new trans-narrative form that seeks to push away from elements that are imbued with linear (heterosexual) conceptions of time that foreclose upon fluid conscious experience. The before and after trope is important to stress in trans-narratives because the juxtaposition ends up highlighting the realness of the present gender, the legitimacy of which must be taken seriously. I do not, however, think this stylistic element should form a crucial aspect of any narrative theory seeking to demolish patriarchal thought.

The re-reading of narratives would also speak more to the push for the change in diagnostic language from gender dysphoria to gender dissonance. The latter means a state of social and/or mental distress due to navigating one's feelings about their identity. In this way gender is not seen as an individual's internal—and pathological—struggle or mental disorder. Built into the new label is a recognition that non-cisgender folk are oppressed, not “sick.” The idea of dissonance can relate to a disruptive narrative or struggle rather than the traditional narrative that seeks to fit the DSM model.<sup>121</sup>

My hopes in this chapter have been to not take away from Prosser's critical analysis here, but to simply expand its potential by providing a robust literary critique of narratives in general. This hopes to serve as a means to bolster and support his work. Trans-narratives illustrate the ways in which the trans psyche cannot be couched in binary terms. The very establishment of transsexual subjectivity requires a transgression from one side of the male/female binary to the other. At various points the trans psyche is a multiplicity of competing narratives of identity, such is the case with Dick and Renée. To interpret the psyche in this way requires an acknowledgment of the specificities of trans embodiment that cannot be discovered through disembodied, unspecific, queer theory analysis. Prosser's work is derived from his unique perspective as a trans man and how he was treated by society pre and post transition. His account greatly aids my project

---

<sup>121</sup> Kelley Winters, “Gender Dissonance,” *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality*, no.3–4 (2008) 86.

of this thesis to reformulate the subject as a multiplicity in order to argue in the final chapter that gender is multiply-constituted.

## Bibliography

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, 84–258. Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- . "Discourse in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981. 259–422.
- . "Epic and Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981. 3–40.
- Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- . "Critically Queer." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1, no. 1 (1993): 17–32.
- . *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Davidmann, Sara. "Border Trouble: photography, strategies and transsexual identities." *Scan* 3, no. 3 (2006). Accessed December 15, 2016. [http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal\\_id=85](http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal_id=85)
- Elliot, Patricia and Katrina Roen. "Transgenderism and the Question of Embodiment." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 4, no. 2 (1998): 231–261.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Ego and the Id*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2019.
- Malatino, Hilary. "Pedagogies of Becoming." *TSQ Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (2015): 395–410.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital: Volume 1*. Trans. Ben Fowkes. Toronto: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Newton, Esther. *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.
- Prosser, Jay. *Second Skins*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- Winters, Kelley. "Gender Dissonance." *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality* 17, no.3-4 (2008) 71–89.

## Gender as a Multiplicity

### 3.1 Introduction

Due to the prolific research appearing in the realm of gender studies, it is becoming more widely accepted that gender is not strictly an innate property. It is not necessarily something that one is born with, nor is it strictly traceable to one's sex organs. An accepted working theory of gender constitution is set in motion by Judith Butler's essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." Here she argues that the gendered self is made through multiple actions—performances—in accordance with not just one's desires, but the pressures of society.<sup>122</sup> Such pressures are the institutions which reinforce gender norms. The gendered self does not merely develop out of itself or its own pre-social substance. In fact, the very word constitution necessitates that identity is owed to its multiple parts; it develops through multiple influences. Gender is shown to be that which is typically referred to as a "social construct." It becomes reified as it turns from a mere concept to something that takes on a very real and tangible meaning in society. Moreover, since gender is something that can be traced back to the various ways it is reinforced within society, its constitution is multiplicitous.

In order to explore gender as a multiplicity, there needs to be a psyche that is capable of accounting for multiple influences. The idea that gender is performative or a social construction denies a formulation of the psyche conducive to the way multiple influences come to bear upon subjectivity. By psyche I mean specifically a theory of consciousness that can especially address the way people internally process thought and language. This internality is important to stress because gender identity is as much thought of by individuals, as it is expressed outwardly.<sup>123</sup> In no way is putting a lens on internality meant to set up a juxtaposition between inner and outer body. It is merely a

---

<sup>122</sup> Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no.4 (1988): 520.

<sup>123</sup> Since this is a philosophical inquiry, I will not be looking at the physical components of the brain related to the aspects of the psyche focused on here. It would be interesting to see how scientific studies of the brain would account for the ideas herein this project.



way of referencing the fact that thoughts are foremost a private experience. The way Butler articulates performativity does not account for interior aspects of thought such as the way language and consciousness are co-constitutive. Though I am convinced that multiple influences come to constitute gender, there is no model to show how such influences bear upon and change consciousness. It follows that not only does there need to be a more substantial model of the psyche within analyses of gender constitution, but also one that allows for a multiplicity. This chapter attempts to formulate such a psyche of a subject that will be able to represent a collectivity of influences. Section one explains how performativity evades a model of the psyche conducive to the representation of multiple influences. Section two introduces Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogical theory that incorporates consciousness, thought and language to model a psyche that is a multiplicity. Following from the work of Luce Irigaray, section three explains how consciousness also has a gendered aspect to its constitution. By taking the work of Bakhtin and Irigaray into account, it is possible to formulate a subject that recognizes and incorporates multiple influences into its psyche. With these influences in mind, it is possible to articulate how gender constitution is a multiplicity.

### 3.2 Gender as a Property?

Butler's conception of the subject is a critique of the subject/object dichotomy that is reinforced by grammatical conventions. In the English language, we write the self-subject "I" as if it is distinct from its properties or actions; the pronoun does the verb action. For example, the phrase "I brush my bunnies" refers to a subject that exists and by virtue of this existence is able to do the action of brushing. This presupposes there is a subject prior to the action that its body "does." Butler explains, "It is, however, clearly unfortunate grammar to claim that there is a 'we' or 'I' that does its body, as if a disembodied agency preceded and directed an embodied exterior."<sup>124</sup> By embodied she refers to what would be the joint act of the agency and the body working in tandem to do the action. The subject instead appears separate from the predicate action which appears

---

<sup>124</sup> Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no.4 (1988): 521.

as some sort of externality.<sup>125</sup> Since it is not a part of the subject, the act appears as an external object, thus creating a subject/object dichotomy. In addition to this, the self appears disembodied because it is impossible to know what exactly it is as a substance without the predicates with which it is described. The “I” is only visible by virtue of what it does; taken alone, the “I” represents nothing. Given this realization, Butler concludes there is no productive reason to expand upon the inner aspects of the psyche because its positioning is already problematic if it is divorced from action.

The theory of performativity is presented as a possible remedy to the conundrum of the disembodied psyche position. In her essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” she focuses on an act-based rather than an ontological mode of understanding gender constitution. Her argument attempts a co-constitutive relation between the body and the “I”. The pronoun and the predicate action can be collapsed within this theory, so that the act is constituted through and with the “I”; the act produces the “I”. She maintains, “In opposition to theatrical or phenomenological models [the “I” or Ego] which take the gendered self to be prior to its acts, I will understand constituting acts not only as constituting the identity of the actor, but as constituting that identity as a compelling illusion[...].”<sup>126</sup> In rejection of the idea that the self is a “locus of agency” that exists prior to the act, Butler moves toward a reconceptualization of identity. She seeks to move away from the idea that identity comes after the substance of agency required to create it.

Butler’s insights help explain why gender appears as an external property one possesses such as age, height or sex. Gender is seen as an attribute separate from the “I”. It appears in addition to us, not as a part of us. While pondering why gender is so difficult as a concept to parse, I realized it came down to language. The way we speak about a subject can frame and direct our further understanding. Relegating gender to the same realm as descriptors such as height and weight—that can be objectively measured—

---

<sup>125</sup> See 1.1 for an explanation of how this “disembodied I” is a product of alienation and a capitalist individualistic psyche.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 520.

makes little sense when one realizes gender is not something that can be pointed to on the body to be measured or seen. There is a problem with accounting for something that has a largely internal component with a model that looks at observable things. Butler overcomes the subject/object dichotomy problem but there is remains no interiority of the psyche to be examined. We cannot point to the internal workings of gender. We need to look, therefore, at language and conscious thought. These internal dynamics seem just as significant to consider regarding constitution as the “outside” multiple influences such as institutions.

### 3.3 Dialogical Theory and the Psyche

Bakhtin’s dialogical theory demonstrates a working idea of what the interiority of the psyche may look like if it is construed as a multiplicity. Language, speech and conscious thought are described in this model as products of multiple influences. These influences focus on encounters with others, culture and institutional authority. Consciousness therefore represents an open-ended prospect. “Truth” or a search for an objective reality does not exist within this model as one can only ever experience partial perspective subject to change. This theory opposes a monological idea of consciousness which promotes a notion of truth that is objective and authoritative. This section explains the difference between both models Bakhtin employs to convey his analysis. I argue that dialogical theory is able to express how multiple influences can constitute the psyche as a multiplicity.

To first understand the difference between dialogical and monological consciousnesses it is first necessary to understand the way Bakhtin conceives of the world of the text. Products of dialogue such as speech and text are already embedded with multiple consciousnesses. According to Bakhtin, “Therefore we may call this the world that creates the text.”<sup>127</sup> Put another way, the textual environment is made up by what is concealed within the literary elements. The word one reads or speaks has a history fetishized within. The “chronotope” further points to the specificities of these

---

<sup>127</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist. (Austin: UTP, 1981), 253.

literary worlds.<sup>128</sup> Each literary style or genre dictates the style of consciousness present within each textual world.

The genre of the novel is a dialogical text that organizes its literary elements quite sporadically. The author does not advocate on behalf of or even speak “about” subjects, and instead speaks “with” them.<sup>129</sup> In Fyodor Dostoevsky’s dialogical novels, a stage is set for conflict and clashes between different social voices. Different voices have different speech-genre’s that are imbued with a specific social class. This could be called a “social language, a discourse peculiar to a specific stratum of society (professional, age group, etc.) within a given social system at a given time.”<sup>130</sup> When we use different language and words around different people, those are said to be different speech-genres. For example, I speak differently to my academic colleagues than I do to my friend who works looking after horses at a barn. Words are not just chosen out of utility, they also convey one’s present social reality. The term “heteroglossia” further explains the linguistic polyphonic climate of the novel. It requires that, “at any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions—social, historical, meteorological, physiological—that will insure that a word uttered in that place will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions.”<sup>131</sup> This model of literary consciousness is able to trace a multitude of its influences within the words and speech chosen by each character.

The model of truth in this genre is that it is open to interpretation. Truth does not arise within the pulsating brain of the individual, but rather, it is dialogically realized through the reality of social encounters. Each person’s interiority or consciousness

---

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>129</sup> David McNally, *Bodies of Meaning: Studies on Language, Labor, and Liberation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2001) 128.

<sup>130</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, “Glossary” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist. (Austin: UTP, 1981), 430.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 428.

(which contains their thoughts, language and speech) is therefore a product of their encounters with others. Historical discourse can never accurately appropriate a single individual's consciousness because it is only "half" hers/his/theirs; the other half is realized during the moment of the encounter. Bakhtin maintains that "individual consciousness actually lies on the border between oneself and the other."<sup>132</sup> People are, according to dialogical theory, "Always in the process of responding to others, [in which] each unique voice resonates with the utterances and accents of others."<sup>133</sup> Put simply, the words I choose depend as much upon who will hear or read them as they do on my agency. I have no ownership over my ideas as they are a product of a world beyond my sole interiority. It is more accurate to call truth an interpretation in this case. It springs forth not from within a singular individual but rather from the relation of that individual to the community. Since truth is found within the encounter of bodies with psyches, it can never be motivated by determinate ideological ends. Truth needs a multitude of carrying voices in order to refrain from becoming an oppressive lens. This model therefore does not just apply to the characters in the novel, but can be used to interpret those of us living outside in the "real world" as well. Dialogical theory is a tool to explain the dynamism of consciousness.

The monological text speaks for its subjects and is an authority. It is the carrier of a single consciousness. It intimates a very limited scope of narration and organization of ideas. This style continuously gravitates toward itself and not outward into the social world.<sup>134</sup> Put differently, it is a closed-off model that requires submission by the characters in the text. It is the desire to understand the other by suppressing their potential for meaning-generating agency within dialogue, that establishes a monological lens. Characters in these stories are often interpreted without regard to their possible internal qualities. Due to this, these characters are unable to constantly replenish accounts with

---

<sup>132</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin, ed. Michael Holquist, Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 293.

<sup>133</sup> David McNally, *Bodies of Meaning*, 128.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

new insights and growth. The classic epic is a style of text which demonstrates the monological voice. These characters operate according to a scripted plot.<sup>135</sup> The style of the genre overdetermines the characters and obfuscates the ability to see their interiority and thus influences.

To give a glimpse of the contrast between monological and dialogical viewpoints, imagine what fundamentally separates a Walt Disney film from a Woody Allen film, besides the animation. The former relies on formulaic plotlines, character-sets and speech while the latter usually consists of a mashing together of erratic characters, natural erratic speech patterns and conflicting moralities, frequently without a clear plot or ending. A dialogical work of this sort raises questions and places the onus of interpretation on the viewer—interpretation is not predetermined by the literary model itself. Moreover, the viewer is not being told or forced what to think through the foreclosure of character agency. The dialogical text thus embodies a polyphonic notion of truth, depicting encounters between different voices and social realities.

The “carnavalesque” described by Bakhtin is a colourful example of dialogical interpretation in motion. Picture the carnival—a mashing together of bodies, voices, debauchery, and differing social classes; masks were often worn to disguise the upper class. Bakhtin’s carnival utopia is critical, Michael Gardiner argues, as it is “able to censure existing relations of domination by recourse to an alternative vision of social organization which is held to better satisfy the legitimate needs, desires and capacities of human beings.”<sup>136</sup> It is a utopic model of dialogism that privileges collectivity over individuality. Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism played out through the carnivalesque and folk-festive culture, further decrowns officialdom by re-instantiating material—often delegitimized—aspects of theory such as the body into discourse hitherto preoccupied with abstract and decontextualized thought such as scientific rationalism and positivism. Through its involvement of bodies (speech comes from some-where) and the physical

---

<sup>135</sup> See chapter 2.3.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

environments in which they inhabit, dialogism represents the open-endedness or polyvalent notion of truth that exceeds that which appears as a singular, and totalizing narrative.<sup>137</sup> Such a narrative is detached and objective. Tom Moylan contextualizes these totalizing epistemologies within the Enlightenment where the imposition of order and positivist assumptions of truth such as scientific rationalism set down roots in the production of knowledge at the expense of difference.<sup>138</sup> Conversely, the carnivalesque emerges at the encounter between people, and thus represents spatio-temporal, interacting, and socially aware bodies never motivated by determinate ideological ends.

Dialogism is an appropriate model for looking at the way multiple influences create aspects of the psyche. People carry with them their speech and such utterances are influenced by their material conditions including their bodies, locations and social class. Much is hidden in language. We cannot “treat any of these forms in isolation from the means for its contextualized (dialogizing) framing [...] its transmission and all the changes in meaning and accent that take place during its transmission.”<sup>139</sup> Speech can be traced back to not just the individual psyche, but through language. Ideas are not our own, then, but appear in us as instantiations of our experience and engagement with others from within our environments. Bakhtinian feminist Josephine Donovan states, “style is an epistemic choice, a political expression.”<sup>140</sup> Dialogism is imbued with literary styles and genres that allow for utopic and collective visions, thus providing a less authoritative model to look at consciousness. The open nature of the model allows for us to interrogate some internal dynamics of psychic constitution and the influences through which they are provoked.

---

<sup>137</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981), 293.

<sup>138</sup> Michael Gardiner, “Bakhtin’s Carnival: Utopia as Critique,” *Utopian Studies* 3, no. 2 (1992): 55.

<sup>139</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 340.

<sup>140</sup> Donovan, Josephine. “Style and Power.” *Feminism, Bakhtin and the Dialogic*. 2nd ed. Ed. Dale M. Bauer and S. Jaret McKinstry. New York: SUNY Press, 1991. 84.

### 3.4 Sharing the World

According to Irigaray's later work in *Sharing the World*, a masculine consciousness exists that promotes a way of being in the world that is hierarchical and oppressive to those that do not have the same power. In this case power is realized through the ownership of the means of production. Since women are not subjects, but commodities, they do not share the same orientation of the psyche conducive to having such ownership of objects and property. This section will outline the masculine type of consciousness and the two other worlds of "the other" and "the common world" outlined in her work. The aim is to show how it is possible to come together to share space and influence one another in a similar way as Bakhtin's dialogism. Put another way, the aim is to show how the interactions between different consciousnesses come together to demonstrate how the socio-material world influences the psyche. This allows for the psyche to be construed as a multiplicity while keeping the gendered aspect of consciousness in mind.

The masculine consciousness is based on his sexuality of the phallus. Irigaray argues that the male sexuality always already requires another to caress the phallus, while a woman is auto-erotic in the sense that she is two—her lips are already touching, and cannot be divisible to one.<sup>141</sup> The male sex is thus oriented toward objects of desire that can touch him to make him realize himself; objects are thus a mirror of himself. The visual object of the phallus is tied to the accumulation of objects, while feminine sexuality is multiple and relies more on touching, on feeling. Within capitalism, we have here "the reduction of man to a concept—that of his labour force—and the reduction of his product to an "object" the visual material correlate of that concept."<sup>142</sup> In this way, the needs and desires of men have presided over the evolution of a social order from its primitive form in private property to its developed form in capital.<sup>143</sup> The psyche, in its masculine orientation is preoccupied with gravitating outward to pursue objects of desire.

---

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 184.



The male consciousness is therefore a projection that seeks to envelop. Intersubjectivity in this instance is a going out to the other and then back to the self to collect oneself. It is a co-constitution but also involves an affective self-constitution.<sup>144</sup> This is reminiscent of monologism where the other is overdetermined by the author of authority. The masculine psyche would be the patriarchal voice carried by institutions that reflect his power.

Irigaray states there are three different worlds: “The one of one’s own, the one of the other, and a common world. This common world is not a world that encompasses and in some way surrounds the two other worlds. It is rather a result of the meeting between two different worlds, in the sense that it is a world that is conditioned on the existence of the two different worlds. The common world is always a world of becoming.”<sup>145</sup> The difference in worlds has to do with how we relate differently to nature and the other.<sup>146</sup> Irigaray emphasizes relationality in this text. She states that men and women’s “relational weaving is not the same.”<sup>147</sup> Relational is an alternative to hierarchy. Therefore, she attempts to establish a non-hierarchical relation between the one and the other, and the common world (also called the environing world). This relationality is in contrast to the masculine consciousness and provides a more dialogical interpretation of the social reality we inhabit.

The presence of a “common world” necessitates that there would be a sharing of this world. This happens through the “Encounter.” Here we learn that consciousness is not just a linguistic concept but a “living energy- a flowering, bringing into being.”<sup>148</sup> Irigaray espouses that “Between the one and the other, a living energy necessarily

---

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>145</sup> Kristin Sampson, “A World of Sexual Difference,” *Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 18, no. 1 (March 2010): 58.

<sup>146</sup> Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 68.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 59.

grows.”<sup>149</sup> We do not just have consciousnesses meeting as says Bakhtin. Instead, we have an organic energy connection. The encounter between, forges new growth from the material world. So here we see how the material world itself bears down upon and alters the psyche. The “Encounter” is a transcendence. And then there is a temporal element as well with a focus on an experience of the present rather than a projection into the future (to envelop). The present encounter is more than just a simple temporalization, it is an ecstasy—a return to the self. The encounter is Irigaray’s later work again reminds us of the carnivalesque, but with a more complex reading of temporality that includes an acknowledgment of the past’s influence on the present.

Irigaray’s ideas on sharing the world are similar to Bakhtin’s except entails a gendered element. In Bakhtin we see how the material world is fetishized in language which finds its way into consciousness, thus making the psyche in some sense material. But in Irigaray’s work there is a careful emphasis on the “meeting of selves”. In Bakhtin’s work such a meeting is described as clashing, and almost abrupt. This is to contrast the calculated oppressive nature of monologism. Yet, in Irigaray we see a careful deliberation of what it means to encounter *in* the moment, not what it means for each subject after the moment. Part of the encounter is letting go so the other has their space to grow—to learn to not master the other as an object. To remember that “another subject remains beyond all the objects we can think of”—a project of their own that we can never think of or interpret.”<sup>150</sup> We can only share our space and ideas. Bakhtin states that our ideas are traceable back to where they were encountered, since each person’s thoughts are actually a collection of everyone else’s ideas and thoughts they picked up along the way through various means. Both believe that nobody owns speech or their ideas since they are traceable to others. Perhaps “To speak of the world as shared, in Irigaray’s sense, implies a conception of a world that transcends each of the two, and that belongs to neither of them. By constructing this conception of a shared world, a possibility of

---

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 84.

affirmation of the freedom of both is opened up.”<sup>151</sup> Both dialogism and sharing emphasize achieving a freedom through breaking free of ideological constraints toward epistemologies that are less oppressive. Irigaray’s input on this matter not only shows how the psyche can be a multiplicity but it also moves us from beyond the binary reading of the male/female subject. We have the world of one’s own, the other, and a common world. In Irigaray’s view, there is a sharing and an overlap.<sup>152</sup>

### 3.5 Conclusion

Bakhtin and Irigaray jointly elucidate a possible avenue wherein the subject is capable of expressing multiple influences that bear upon and create aspects of the psyche. Bakhtin proposes an analysis that can account for language that is imbued with authority. This intimates the ways in which institutionalized norms and law are reinforced within the psyche. Literary elements such as speech genres are imbued with authoritative dictates of their respected time periods. Such dictates find their way into consciousness due to the way language is traced through communication with others. By tracing consciousness dialogically, it is possible to see how gendered norms are reinforced into the psyche. This model provides a way to understand the way we think about our gender, and express it through language and action. This should ameliorate performativity theory, by proposing that acts of gender expression have noteworthy interior components as well.

Irigaray’s model for “sharing the world” provides a way to look at the psyche as a multiplicity from a gendered perspective. A subject that refers or gravitates toward the other or others rather than the self, is proposed as an alternative way to view and write about the psyche. The way people encounter could be a reciprocal experience that mutually changes the other. This intersubjective way of thinking of the subject represents the way in which others influence the way we think. This again explains how others are able to impart influence and contribute to a psyche that is a multiplicity; a world of ideas

---

<sup>151</sup> Kristin Sampson, “A World of Sexual Difference,” 58.

<sup>152</sup> Though Irigaray does not explicitly address a trans consciousness in her work, she leaves space where trans voices could be. The world of the “other” could be anyone as nobody can be fully interpreted.

that are as much ours as they are the others implicated in our world. In conjunction with Bakhtin's dialogical model of consciousness, there is a way here to reformulate a subject able to convey how multiple influences impact the psyche.

There are similarities between Bakhtin's idea of monological consciousness and Irigaray's idea of a masculine consciousness. They both seek to envelop the contents of their worlds in order to possess others within it. This creates a singular viewpoint. The monological viewpoint represents authority. Those authorities are the men who own the means of production and institutions. It is possible, therefore, to argue that the monological viewpoint is a masculine and patriarchal viewpoint. The way perspectives are reinforced through language and sociality shows how monological-masculine gender is reinforced in the psyche. One cannot reach these conclusions by using a model that either renders the psyche as an individual, or in Butler's case, neglects a view of consciousness (and thus language). This shows, moreover, how the psyche formulated as a multiplicity is able to convey how the male gender is constituted as a multiplicity.

It is also possible to explore the constitution of other genders with a psyche that is a multiplicity. The psyche of the individual, as discussed in chapter one, can account only for a psyche that represents a male perspective since it is associated with the individual under capitalism. Once the interiority of the individual is opened up, however, it is possible to see how others' influences contribute to the makeup of the psyche. There is no longer a self that is constituted through self-referential means, but one constituted through encounters with others. An entire world of the social through language and encounters, influences one's ideas. This model shows there is a way to express the multitude of different voices bearing upon one's consciousness. This plethora of difference accounts for the realities of many different viewpoints besides the masculine individual.

## Bibliography

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, 84–258. Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- . "Discourse in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981. 259–422.
- . "Epic and Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981. 3–40.
- Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- . "Critically Queer." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1, no. 1 (1993): 17–32.
- . *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Donovan, Josephine. "Style and Power." *Feminism, Bakhtin and the Dialogic*. 2nd ed. Ed. Dale M. Bauer and S. Jaret McKinstry. New York: SUNY Press, 1991. 84–94.
- Gardiner, Michael. "Bakhtin's Carnival: Utopia as Critique." *Utopian Studies* 3, no. 2 (1992): 53–84.
- Irigaray, Luce. *Sharing the World*. London: Continuum Press, 2008.
- McNally, David. *Bodies of Meaning: Studies on Language, Labor, and Liberation*. Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2001.
- Sampson, Kristin. "A World of Sexual Difference." *Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 18, no. 1(2010): 57–60.

## Conclusion

Why does it matter if we can talk about the constitution of gender? Why even bother trying to understand gender at all if it is too complicated? Thinking of gender as a property of a disembodied psyche undermines those working in areas of gender activism. It is difficult to explain why gender identities are valid and should be recognized when gender itself seems like a mysterious quality that cannot be grasped. The theory of performativity inspired many to fight for gender equality; it was a text inspired by those already fighting. Any theory such as this that can potentially help society to understand gender identity can especially benefit non-cisgender identities. Devaluation of non-cisgender folk is partially able to persist because there is a lack of any sort of theory or “proof” to back up and explain the constitution of gender identity. Put differently, when there is no way to discuss the psychic aspect to gender constitution, there is no way to legitimize the feelings and thoughts of vulnerable non-cisgender people. Exploring other means of constitution has the potential to provide activists with more knowledge, and thus leverage for their causes.

The main impetus behind the idea for this thesis is to provide some sort of theoretical “answer” to a common social predicament facing non-cisgender people today. There is a growing concern among some that the acronym for LGBTQ2S+ will keep expanding.<sup>153</sup> To phrase the predicament as a question: “why are there so many gender identities today?” Some people are accused of making up their identities or are told: “it’s just a phase.” There is also a conflation between gender identity (woman, genderqueer, non-binary, trans, man etc) and one’s gender expression (feminine, androgynous, masculine etc.). The former refers to the inner felt experience and the latter is the way one acts and performs identity through signals such as clothing. In Butler’s work however, the difference between the two terms is obfuscated due to the lack of attention to the interior psyche. Moreover, when gender is something that seems almost ephemeral

---

<sup>153</sup> This is not to say that many non-cisgender identities have not always historically existed. There are simply more types gaining traction and more ways to label one’s identity.

because it cannot be pointed to, those that identify as non-cisgender folk may become discriminated against.

The short answer to this question, and what I believe my thesis has ultimately shown, is that “gender” does not actually exist. It is a bankrupt concept. It is a placeholder that holds no place. What we think gender is, is actually just a person’s consciousness. Gender is socially, but also psychically (and materially) constructed. The institutions that reinforce the norms find their way into language and that is how these norms become part of our consciousnesses, or how gender is reinforced. Gender is not a property or predicate quality of an “I”, it is a part of our very psyche. Therefore, it can be said that we do not have different genders, just different consciousnesses.

It stands to reason that there are as many different iterations of gender as there are iterations of consciousness. The male and female genders appear the most common because they are reinforced by the majority of institutions prefaced on the binary model of gender. The male/female binary reinforced by the heterosexual model of procreation asserts itself more often. The dominance of this binary finds its way into the way we use language, which reinforces specific types of thought. Non-binary and trans folk appear as if they are “new” identities. This is not the case, it is just that institutions have slowly begun to make more room for non-cis identities, so more genders as well as sexual orientations, are able to become more visible to society. The categories of gender share enough commonalities to appear as opaque categories. This is an illusion, however, because each person’s interior relationship to their gender is unique like their consciousness (because they are intertwined).

Gender construed as a multiplicity also has the ability to better explain agency with regard to gender constitution. Put another way, how it appears as if some people choose gender identities for a political reason (not based on which gender they most feel like). For example, someone may choose to identify as non-binary because they do not agree with binary gender logic and thus feel as if they are a different identity. Agency is what I take to be the confusing part when it comes to the perception that the LGBT acronym is constantly expanding. Those that affirm non-binary, genderqueer,

genderfluid, identities, as examples, sometimes choose to be their gender because it represents not just their felt, but their psychic identity. The way one thinks about their identity is the interior component to gender constitution able to be considered when opening up the subject to a multiplicity. The dynamism of consciousness is mirrored by the dynamism of the development of different gender identities.

Gender is potentially subject to change and the acknowledgment of this reality challenges binary culture. Instances occur where one's relation to their gender is modified through their own agency as well as influences of encounters with others and institutions. As examples, some trans folk may de-transition and some cisgender people shift into a questioning state. Yet, some identify as the same gender from birth to the present. Of course, biology must play a role as well. This is not meant to be an exhaustive foray into the constitution of gender, but moreso way to reframe the discussion to make sense of the confusion surrounding gender today.

This brings us to the question: If there are so many possibilities when it comes to gender, should we just get rid of the concept? I argue that it is still important to label and categorize genders at this point regardless of how long the acronym becomes. Labelling brings visibility to groups that need recognition within institutions and support in the face of gender oppression. It would not make sense to do away with the category of gender unless everyone is already equal. This thesis has been less about finding an origin for gender than it has been about finding out how to reduce harm given a social reality that is often hostile towards non-binary genders. Such harm may be reduced by reframing the subject so that gender can be regarded as an integral part of the constitution of our consciousness. Since our consciousness is made up of others, we all have a stake in the ethical treatment of one another based on gender.



## Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Jessica N. Ellis

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:** York University 2009–2015  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
B.A. Specialized Honours in Philosophy  
Dean’s Honour Roll

Global TESOL College 2012  
Newmarket, Ontario, Canada  
Advanced TESOL International Certificate

The University of Western Ontario 2016–Present  
London, Ontario, Canada  
M.A. Theory and Criticism

The European Graduate School July–August 2017  
Saas-Fee, Valais, Switzerland  
Seminars: Pierre Alféri, Karen Barad, Judith Butler, Catherine Malabou, Avital Ronell, Carlos Amorales  
Visiting student in Philosophy, Art, Critical Theory

Cornell University June–August 2018  
Ithaca, New York, USA  
Sponsored student at the Summer School of Criticism and Theory

The European Graduate School July 25–27 2020  
Seminar: Slavoj Žižek and Siegfried Zielinski  
Visiting student in Philosophy, Art, Critical Theory

**Honours and Awards:** Undergraduate University Entrance Scholarship  
2 X \$500  
2009

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Robbie Burns Poetry Contest Prize  
York University  
\$50  
2014

Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)  
Waitlisted for Master’s award

	2017	
	Sponsored Student by Western University to attend SCT at Cornell University \$3000	
	2018	
<b>Related Work Experience:</b>	TOEFL Preparation Course Teacher Zhejiang University Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China	2012
	English Teacher LCentral Language School Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China	2012
	Teaching Assistant The University of Western Ontario FILM 2196	2016
	Teaching Assistant The University of Western Ontario WOMENST 2161	2017
	English Teacher Palfish Inc.	2018–Present
	English Teacher Global VCC Language School	March 2020–Present

### **Publications:**

- “The Background of Truth.” *Glendon’s Protem: Ontario’s First Bilingual Newspaper* 7, no. 53 (2013).
- “A Night of Poetry,” *Glendon’s Protem: Ontario’s First Bilingual Newspaper* 7, no. 52 (2014).
- “Law, Women and Ancient Society,” *Polymath: An Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences Journal* for the Southern University of Illinois, special issue dedicated to Exceptional Undergraduate Research 6 no. 2 (2016).
- “An Interview with Dr. Mariana Ortega,” conducted by Jessica Ellis, Julian Evans and Sangie Zaitsoff in *Chiasma: The Journal for the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism* 6, no. 5 (2018).
- “The Relationship between Autobiography and Transnarratives,” in *Chiasma: The Journal for the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism* 6, no.5 (2018).

### **Conference Papers:**

- “Rethinking the Body: Nietzsche’s Ethological Instrument,” at York University’s National Undergraduate Philosophy Conference. York University, Toronto, ON, CA (May 2013).
- “Law, Women and Ancient Society,” at Southern University of Illinois Undergraduate Conference, Southern University of Illinois, Edwardsville, Illinois, USA (October 2015).
- “The Methodological Defiance of Epistemologies of Collectivity,” at Defiance: Interdisciplinary Conference by the Dalhousie Association of Graduate Students in English, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS, CA (August 2017).
- “Structural Impediments to Neo-Liberation,” at the Seventh Biennial Conference of the International Herbert Marcuse Society, York University, Toronto, ON, CA (October 2017).
- “Trans-narratives and Bakhtin’s Chronotope,” at Matters of Fact: The 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Graduate Student Conference in Comparative Literature, Hispanic Studies, and Theory and Criticism, Western University, London, ON, CA (March 2018).
- “Embodied Struggle in the Visionary Science Fiction of Octavia’s Brood,” at Embodiment in Science Fiction and Fantasy, McMaster University, Hamilton, ON, CA (May 2018).
- “Spaces of Subjectivity: Camp Culture and the Constitution of Cis and Trans Psyche in Gender Theory,” at Camp: The 22nd Annual Graduate Student Conference in Comparative Literature, Hispanic Studies, and Theory and Criticism, Western University, London, ON, CA (March 2020). *Cancelled due to Covid-19.*

### **Workshops:**

- “The Black in the Cul-de-Sac: Afro-Pessimism as the Crisis of Critical Theory” workshop by Dr. Frank B. Wilderson III, Western University, London, ON, CA (March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2017).
- Congress of the Humanities. Attended talks and panels of the Canadian Philosophical Association, Ryerson University, Toronto, ON, CA (May 28th-31st 2017).

### **Editing Experience:**

- Assistant Editor for *Matter: A Collection from The Margins*, a Journal of the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism, Western University, London, ON, CA (2017).

Assistant Editor for *Stance International Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy*. Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, USA (2014–2015).

Editor-in-Chief for *The Oracle: York University's Undergraduate Philosophy Journal*  
York University, Toronto, ON, CA (2014).

**University Service:** President of York University's Undergraduate Philosophy Association, Philosophia  
York University, Toronto, ON, CA  
Spring 2014–2015

Member of Women's Empowerment Club  
York University, Toronto, ON, CA  
2014–2016

Undergraduate Student Representative on Adjudication  
Committee for Professor Jacob Beck's promotion to tenure  
York University, Toronto, ON, CA  
Fall 2014

Member of DIF (Decolonial, Intersectional, Feminist) Caucus  
The University of Western Ontario, London, ON, CA  
Fall 2016–2018

Graduate Student Peer Counsellor in the Student Development  
Centre  
The University of Western Ontario, London, ON, CA  
Fall 2016–2017

Member of the Equity Committee for SOGS  
The University of Western Ontario, London, ON, CA  
Fall 2017–2018

SOGS Representative for the Centre for the Study of Theory and  
Criticism  
The University of Western Ontario, London, ON, CA  
Fall 2017–2018