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DELUSIONS OF GENDER:

Sex, Identity and Intersubjectivity

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SYNOPSIS

Postmodern debate around subjectivity in the latter half of the twentieth century formed the intellectual basis for decentring the subject. Yet in most fields of cultural production the subject remains grounded in the dualistic and hierarchised sex/gender system. I argue that practices of reading and reception support the persistence of what Foucault has termed this "interplay of truth and sex".

To articulate subjects free from the subject-object relations of the sex/gender system requires a new model for conceiving and reading the subject. To this end I offer in this thesis a critique of current theories around sex and gender, intersubjectivity as a new model for articulating subjectivity, and a close reading of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: a biography* as a literary practice of intersubjectivity. Taking reading practices for my mode and object of analysis I advance an interdisciplinary dialogue, across a diverse range of material, to make connections and offer insights that exceed the boundaries of the specific disciplines.

The thesis is organised into two Sections. In Section 1 I consider the limitations of purportedly subversive cultural practices to transform the hierarchical inequities of the sex/gender system. Radical analyses of this system have de-naturalised the causal link between sex, gender and sexuality. This dislinkage has been essential to postmodern feminist thinking about subjectivity. However, it has been used as theoretical leverage to suggest that counter-cultural practices that invert relations between sex, gender and sexuality are *ipso facto* productive interventions into the sex/gender system.

I contend that such inversions are not sufficient to challenge the persistent centrality of that system; moreover, in some instances they actively reproduce its inequities. I consider the significance of experience and standing to the articulation of subjectivity, and I argue that subject-object relations structure the hierarchy central to the sex/gender system. I offer a reconceptualization of experience as active, moving it away from the stasis of place and

guaranteed authority, toward the spaces where agency is in motion. This establishes the basis for conceptualising intersubjective relations.

In Section 2 I propose a connection between the discursive fields of reception theory, quantum physics and *Orlando* to develop my model of intersubjectivity. Their intellectual projects coincide temporally and to that extent share a modernist horizon. Yet, more importantly, I argue for an intellectual parity between them concerning the transition from a subject-object to an intersubjective dynamic. Each is involved in an epistemological and ontological inquiry into intersubjectivity within their respective fields.

The materialism now prevalent in debates around gender and sexuality fixes sites for those positions to speak from within subject-object relations. Yet from a physical perspective materiality is fundamentally challenged at its very basis in uncertainty. I locate subject-object relations within a newtonian world view and offer intersubjectivity as a model for subjectivity that aligns with quantum thought. I bring this reading apparatus to Woolf to articulate the subjective aesthetics of *Orlando*. In this novel Woolf's concern with the representation of subjectivity, beyond the reflexive impositions of the sex/gender system, produces a compelling literary argument for intersubjectivity.

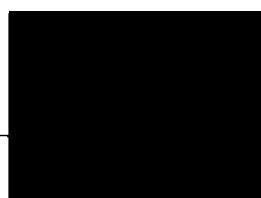
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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution.

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Elizabeth Day



Date: 25/12/01

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INTRODUCTION

He - for there could be no doubt of his sex...

(Woolf, 1928: 13)

The quivering yet still discrete modernist subject, exemplified in Woolf's quote, was to be dis-integrated discursively by postmodern reconceptualizations of identity. This required fundamental rethinking by transformative politics, such as feminism, which were mobilised by the very concept of subject now in question. Under the pressure of postmodern intellectual advances, the category "woman" – the point of departure for feminism – could no longer support the work it was meant to do. Most work under the rubric of feminism was enabled by the fiction and function of the category "woman". The mobilisation of feminist analyses from this conceptual link between sexed bodies and social genders represented a prioritisation of interest, a strategic use of the category "woman"; yet the troubling implications of this kind of political choice are still, perhaps only just now, being worked through.

The central argument of this thesis concerns gendered subjectivity. While postmodernism offers a decentred subject, reading practices ensure the subject remains gendered and sexed. I contend that subject-object relations support such reading practices and I develop a model for intersubjectivity that radically alters the reception and production of the subject. Woolf's sawn-off quote (above) offers conceptually and typographically a map of my approach. In this remarkable opening sentence of *Orlando*, Woolf launches a skeptical inquiry into the subject in two direct ways. She mimics the cultural prioritising of gender over sex – that biological sex does not determine gender, rather, gender provides the context within which to 'read' biology. And in the space between them she articulates with irony the doubt and denial that

generate their fusion. Separating gender (the pronoun, 'He') from sex, by a bar and an erroneous assumption ('for there could be no doubt'), the quote articulates the problem for subjective representation in a system that connects gender to sex without allowing room for doubt. In this novel gender and sex fail to guarantee or corroborate each other. The elaboration of this failure is what makes the text at once pleasurable and radical in its aesthetics of subjectivity. To prepare a framework for this reading of *Orlando* I analyse the limits in current inquiries into the sexed and gendered subject, and of the role that reading plays in the perpetuation of the sex/gender system that *Orlando* destabilises.

I construct a new path toward analysis of Woolf to produce fresh understandings both of Woolf and of the subject. I have found it crucial to shape a new model of the subject, and articulate its relationship to practices of reading, in order to address Woolf's text at its focal and most creative level. Hence my argument works at liminal points of sex/gender criticism and at liminal points of Woolf criticism. It is neither centred on critiques of the sex/gender system, nor on ways of reading Woolf. Rather, it asks key questions about the gendered and sexed subject that are not answered either by domains of sex/gender theory or feminist discursivity around Woolf. It mediates those domains with theories of reception. The first of my questions about the subject relates to compulsory gender acquisition. I ask: must the subject acquire gender in order to achieve intelligibility? Can there be subjective agency resistant to the internalisations and externalisations of gender identification? To explore these questions I turn to the rich field of inquiry into the sex/gender system and am compelled to respond to the strategies of identity politics.

Identity politics negotiated newer conceptions of the subject at an uneasy juncture of modernism and postmodernism. Feminisms had treated this question of the subject through the 1970s and 1980s in both sides of the famous division between so-called Anglo-American essentialist feminists (the gynocritics) and French feminist theorists. Through the 1990s these debates were taken up by increasingly prominent lesbian, gay and queer discourses and thought in terms of not only gendered but also sexualised subjects. The opening up of discursive space between sexuality and gender (originally attributed to Gayle Rubin) further complicated ways of knowing the subject. The relationship between biological sex, gender, and sexuality was no longer taken to be transparently reciprocal. It was newly understood as the specifically descriptive formula of heterosexuality. The formation of the question in these more recent

discourses, though, is still influenced by prior debates within feminism around essentialism and subjectivity.

Since late twentieth-century critical thought in the humanities has to an extent integrated postmodernism, the challenge for identity politics has been to enunciate yet not fix, to render intelligible yet not essentialise, marginalised identities (women, lesbian, gay, queer, coloured, classed *etc.*). Butler calls this the 'embarrassed "etc"' whose position at the end of this 'horizontal trajectory of adjectives' which 'strive to encompass a situated subject' signals the inevitable impossibility of the list's completion. 'This is a sign of exhaustion as well as of the illimitable process of signification itself. *It is the supplement, the excess that necessarily accompanies any effort to posit identity once and for all.* This illimitable *et cetera*, however, offers itself as a new departure for feminist political theorizing' (1990: 143). In the new territory of this *et cetera*, her publication of *Gender Trouble* initiated effective consideration of how postmodern theory might radically undermine the gendered subject. In what became a transformative text in this area she argued:

it is no longer clear that feminist theory ought to try to settle the questions of primary identity in order to get on with the task of politics. Instead, we ought to ask, what political possibilities are the consequence of a radical critique of the categories of identity? What new shape of politics emerges when identity as a common ground no longer constrains the discourse on feminist politics? And to what extent does the effort to locate a common identity as the foundation for a feminist politics preclude a radical inquiry into the political construction and regulation of identity itself? (1990: ix).

Butler's answer to the crisis of subjectivity is to proliferate representations of identity in order to render intelligible those possibilities that exist but that are rendered invisible in the interests of the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence, which requires viable subjects for its force. But, as Naomi Schor says in her introduction to *The Essential Difference*

the very multiplication of subject positions, carried out in the name of de-essentializing such massive monolithic categories as women or worse Woman, has gone hand in hand with the

consolidation of an identity politics which in many respects reinscribes essentialism. (Schor & Weed, eds, 1994: xviii)¹

In other words 'to undo Difference by multiplying differences is not necessarily to do away with Difference'. In the same text Teresa de Lauretis argues – against anti-essentialist poststructuralist critiques of feminism – for a provocative revision of the notion of essentialism. The 'essence' of feminism is not "woman". It expresses 'a totality of qualities, properties, and attributes' that feminists define for themselves (Schor & Weed, eds, 1994: 3). For de Lauretis "essence" is a feminist re-vision; a political difference; a way of reading the world that differs from anti-feminist or nonfeminist perspectives. She challenges heterocentric practices in feminism, suggesting Anglo-American feminists who suspect or construct a "fantom feminist essentialism" are motivated not so much by the risk of essentialism itself but by 'the risk of challenging directly the social-symbolic institution of heterosexuality' (1994: 33). The designation as essentialist of diverse feminist and, significantly, lesbian thinkers (including Rich, Daly, MacKinnon, Wittig), suggests to de Lauretis 'an unwillingness to confront and come to terms with the stakes, indeed the investments that feminism may have in the heterosexual institution'. Without such a confrontation, she asks, 'can we remain feminists?' (1994: 33).

In the 1990s critical enquiry into identity politics took careful aim at the emergent queer theory. De Lauretis had hoped that "queerness" would become a politically effective, denaturalising term in the work of gender and sexuality theory and politics, only to renounce her support a few years after expressing it. The mistake I see as implicit in her and others' optimism was to rely on the category "queer" rather than to work on the practices of deployment and reception of identity categories. A clear lesson from "queer" is that identification is never fully and purely strategic, never free from the tendency for fixity and certainty. Butler cautioned that "queer" must be deployed and received as unstable and fluid in its expressions of pleasure, sexuality, gender and the identities that play around those interrelations (1993b). Such caution does not in its rhetorical form enact its desired effects. Practices of deployment and reception are more crucial to critical effectiveness than rhetoric alone can be.

¹ Some of the more innovative responses to this problem have come out of Canada and North America: Probyn (1993) argues for a dynamic relation between gender and subjectivity which allows for categories of the real which are both producers and products of language; and de Lauretis proposes a strategic essentialism in her conception of "essential differences".

If queer in all its coalitional inclusiveness has not succeeded in undoing the naturalising impulse of identification categories – how could it? – it is not redundant for that fact. For identity politics queer is a term weighted heavily with the expectations and hopes of those theorists advocating its effectiveness.² A tendency in those theorists to anticipate what future might be ushered in by queer as a theory and self-identification, has to an extent been displaced into imagined future resolutions about subjectivity that are if nothing else questions of the present. In terms of queer's potential to rewrite the processes by which identificatory categories get hierarchised, deployed and internalised, its brief history foretold its limits. It seems to have joined those categories as one more to be contested and might now be taken as an adjacent descriptor to lesbian, gay, transgender and bisexual. Queer's emergence has certainly re-focused attention on the relationships between gender, sexuality, and the corollary identifications that compete and shift territory through effects of power. From the perspective of this thesis, however, settling border disputes is a labour of diminishing returns. The horizon of my thinking extends to the processes of agential intersubjectivity not the relationship between specific – fluid or static – categories themselves.

Following Butler's strategy of proliferation, questions about the effects of identification itself (as a *process* rather than a type: "queer" or "post-feminist") are overridden by explicitly "politicised" questions, as in current feminist fascination with borders and limits of various identity formation. My argument proceeds from questions raised by such practices. How might fluid or unfixed identities be constituted, and how might they take discursive effect? The increased emphasis on articulating newer subjectivities can sideline the address, or reception, of that self-avowed subjectivity. What role does reception play in enabling a queer subjectivity to be performed discursively? How effective can self-avowal be in altering normative reading practices if those very practices disavow its significance? My central argument addresses these questions through three key terms: experience, the subject, and reception.

Experience

Subjectivity appears to result from the inevitability of being called into question, in one form or other. The motivational force sustaining critical investigations of gendered identity must be, inevitably, experiential in some way. The form that experience might be allowed to take, and the reach of its effects have been of concern in debates around

² For coverage of the histories and disputes settled around the term "queer" see Jagose (1996: 101-126).

gender. To build my argument for intersubjectivity I work with a notion of experience that is not found in conventional feminist appeals to authenticity or unproblematised authority. I prefer a notion that captures the sense of the present-moment awareness of the subject. To introduce that notion I call forth here an instance where my experience as subject – where I – was called to account within a gendered horizon. This anecdote exemplifies the calling-into-being of the subject, and the problem of reception for self-avowed identities within such a horizon.

As a child I moved geographic locations and schools with some regularity, thus my self-identifications were frequently jarred and readjusted at the point of arrival in a new context. Despite differences in accent, spoken language, handwriting styles and communities of shared understanding, of all my identifications none was so troubling to my new peers as my gender identity. A memorable instance occurred at a local park where I was asked the question, not unfamiliar to me then, 'what are you: a boy or a girl?'. It was a question that usually activated confused feelings of liberation and trouble, in Butler's sense in her Preface (1990). Liberation because it recognised my disavowal of a discrete gender identity. Trouble because it *mis*recognised that disavowal as a falling short. To respond one way or the other was to assert as obvious and positive – 'I'm a girl' (with its implicit and duplicitous 'of course') – that which was clearly not obvious, since it had been called into question by me and thus by them. Troubling also, then, because not to provide the either/or answer was to reveal the unspeakable: neither boy, nor girl. What then? Unable to find a position which satisfied me, to a question which made no real sense to me (and refusing someone else's imperative that I name myself), I made no answer, and so they threatened to remove my clothes and find out for themselves. (Gayle Rubin's dislocation of sex from gender had not yet impacted to forestall their folly of reading my gender off my body) The threat promised to add injury to the insulting impertinence of the demand that I have, and that I declare, a gender. So I ran home.

It was clear to me then that the definite demarcation of my own gender identity was crucial to my inquisitors' experience of their own gender. Their own internalised uncertainty about how to experience authentic gender was to be allayed by externalised repetitions of the truth of oppositional gender positions – boy or girl. I had to be one or the other lest the basis for their gender-certainty be violated. For their subjective truths to persist I too had to believe in and advocate my gender. Just as surely, though, the reverse applied to me: my own internalised indifference to gender-oppositionality felt

under threat from their insistence upon it. For my subjective truth to persist they too had to own up to the implausibility of actually *being* one or other gender. To *be* an abstraction ("boy", "girl") was an experiential impossibility, evidently betrayed in their anxious insistence upon the abstraction. This was neither the time nor space for such reflections, though, as the question of identity was overwhelmed by the more immediate question of personal safety from imminent assault.

The violence that comes from a position of cultural standing aims to shame its object; and shame silences. A subjective encounter such as mine in the park sets the scene for those questions I ask of identity politics about the contexts and receptions which render signs intelligible. There are times when one can run from threats, but can one run from signs? I mobilise the analysis of subjectivity in this thesis from the perspective of the impossibility of *being* a subject; from the perspective where gender is encountered as a cultural delusion that casts a net of behavioural and semiotic restrictions over experiential agency. My argument proceeds from the perspective of agency, rather than from a retrospective critique of any specific interpretive effect of subjectivity. Hence I ask: what other subjective differences are possible when the subject does not begin from identification? If material inequalities are in part executed through the introjection of gender (under threat, as Butler has argued) then what happens to gender, and to politics, when that "choice" to introject is not made, or is made incompletely, or is abandoned?

The Subject

Subjectivity can be understood broadly to refer to representations of self within a shared semiotic code. *Representation* refers to the cultural and textual forms and processes by which subjectivity is articulated. *Identity* denotes a combination of conceptual and experiential epistemologies: idealisations and felt experiences through which the self is imagined to be constituted. Subjectivity is the articulation of selfhood. Philosophy has worked with the subject traditionally as a singularity, a self-presence, a sign of mastery, an organising principle of essence. The rational Cartesian subject may not be the original but is certainly the emblem of such metaphysical treatment. Toward the second half of the twentieth century, philosophy – particularly and influentially French philosophy – radically rethought the subject as it rethought its own epistemological and ontological status. Taking up those reconfigurations, I work with the "subject" to bypass its singularising and reifying ends.

In the early 1990s Jean-Luc Nancy invited contemporary French philosophers to answer his question "Who comes after the subject?" (Nancy *et al*, eds, 1991). According to Luce Irigaray, the question was 'not a matter of changing such and such a thing within a horizon already defined as human culture, it is a matter of changing the horizon itself. It is a matter of understanding that our interpretation of human identity is theoretically and practically incorrect' (Nancy *et al*, eds, 1991: 167). Her response is to radically question the category "subject" and its origins in material history, to broaden the horizon of thought on the subject. Similarly, Gilles Deleuze addresses the question by conceding that 'a concept does not die simply when one wants it to, but only when new functions in new fields discharge it. This is why it is never very interesting to criticize a concept: it is better to build the new functions and discover the new fields that make it useless or inadequate' (1991: 94) and in this way 'the position of philosophy is not fundamentally different from that of science or art' (1991: 95). Again, the response is a call to create – much as the arts and sciences do – new fields within which to pose new questions. Sylviane Agacinski takes her cue from the very questioning itself: 'Is not the possibility of calling on, or of being called on, to answer – or more simply, of calling or being called – a more crucial matter than questions concerning *who* or *what*?' (1991: 9).

Jean-Luc Nancy's meditations on the question follow Hegel to the extent that the subject is 'that which is capable of maintaining within itself its own contradiction' (1991: 6). This contradiction or alienation is an effect of the logic of grammar, whereby the subject splits from its verb, for example, in the subject-object formula "I am". The subject becomes thus the technical interpretation of "Being", where Being is 'the actuality of existence'. Existence here is not an essence; rather it designates the existing in experience. It is a coming into presence, defined as a freedom (1991: 8), 'freedom as the very experience of coming into presence' (1991: 8). The "I" does not preexist this schematisation. It does not come after it either: it "is" it, or it "exists" it. In this sense, freedom is 'not a quality, nor an operation of the existent', rather, it is its 'coming into the presence of existence'. The "I" here seems to be the momentary arising of an experiencing consciousness, of agency. The presence Nancy works with is not the metaphysical fantasy of self-presence; it is not a private and personalised presence but a presence in community with its context. 'This community without the essence of a community, without a common being, is the ontological condition of existence as presence-to' (1991: 8).

Nancy's definition liberates existence in a 'community without a subject' and thus breathes life into "subject", separating the experiencing agent from the inadequate designations of logic. This formulation renders unintelligible the subject-object model, favouring what proximates intersubjectivity. My approach to the subject in this thesis aligns with such a focus on freedom, address, reception and the fields and horizons that enable the intelligibility of difference. Through reconsideration of debates around subjectivity, I postulate a reconception of the relation of experience to subjectivity, whereby experience comes to represent a radical new potential for intersubjective agency that does not owe its cultural standing to the authorising fiction of gender.³ Focus shifts from the *who* and *what* to the intersubjective processes of address. This focus calls for analysis of reception.

Reception

In his introduction to the English edition of Hans Robert Jauss's *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* Paul de Man encodes his critique of reception theory by cautioning that the hermeneutics of experience and the hermeneutics of reading 'are not necessarily compatible' (Jauss, 1982: xvii). 'Not necessarily' leaves the question open and invites the counter that they are not necessarily incompatible either. Though he was not alive to witness it, de Man's own experiences as a contributor to collaborationist French journals in the 1940s had enormous impact, when this was discovered in 1987, on interpretations of his later work.⁴ It has long been rightly argued that authorial experience does not fully predetermine textual interpretation; it can surely now be granted, well after deconstruction's peak in US literary criticism, that the word is not separated from the world, that linguistic systems are not hermetically sealed.

The relationship between words and histories is mediated by their receptions, according to the work of reception theorists. Despite their immense impact in German intellectual work, and the relevance of reception to any cultural discourse, reception

³ For a different and more conventional feminist reading of subjectivity see Schor (1994). Schor traces the distinct positions of Beauvoir and Irigaray on the question of feminist subjectivity, given that they started from 'the same assumptions about women's exile from subjectivity' (1994: 48). Beauvoir's subject is defined by action (one is not born but becomes a woman); Irigaray's is defined by language. 'Whereas for Beauvoir the goal is for women to share fully in the privileges of the transcendent subject, for Irigaray the goal is for women to achieve subjectivity without merging tracelessly into the putative indifference of the shifter' (47). For Schor, what is at stake in the difference of these positions is not the status of difference but of universalism. Beauvoir wants to raise women to the position of the universal, to speak with its power, whereas Irigaray's "parler femme" is not so much essentialist as anti-universalist.

⁴ See for example *Diacritics* (1990) Fall issue, and Hamacher (*et al*, eds, 1989).

theory never really took hold in North American, English and Australian intellectual fields. There are limitations to reception theory. Robert Holub argues that confusions and disagreements over terminology may have sabotaged its US reception at the height of deconstruction's influence (1992).⁵ Reception theory fails as a hermeneutic project if it claims to discern the truth of a text or tradition. That is the critical position that de Man and Stanley Fish took on reception theory. Holub argues, however, that the US reception failed to understand the radicalism of reception theory, applying a narrow definition of radicalism characterised by novelty and negation (1992: 22-36). But reception theory remains the most coherent and persistent attempt to account for the process of intersubjectivity within literary history through its analysis of reading and subjectivity.

Cultural studies have generated their own methodologies for audience-based analyses of cultural products. Brunt (1992) sketches a general developmental history of cultural studies' interest in textual effects and audience response. She covers James Halloran's research in 1970 (*The Effects of Television*) into the relationship between juvenile delinquency and television violence, which formed part of the shift toward a privileging of the text; Stuart Hall's model, in the 1980s, for understanding media codes according to preferred, dominant, negotiated or opposed meanings; David Morley's 1980 pioneering audience study (*The Nationwide Audience*) and Janice Radway's 1984 audience study (*Reading the Romance*). Brunt suggests the more interesting work on audiences, within cultural studies, is that carried out by feminist researchers such as Radway, Constance Penley (on fanzines), Ien Ang (*Watching Dallas*), Helen Taylor (*Gone With the Wind, Scarlett's Women*), and Jacqueline Bobo (African-american women readers of *The Color Purple*). Much of this work examines audiences literally. For example, the audience of black women in Bobo's work, for once addressed by a film as political subjects, was held to constitute a "community of heightened consciousness" (Brunt, 1992: 76) wherein newly acquired self-images can create a force for change. While this ethnographic audience work is inevitably productive of politicised perspectives, my arguments are distinguished from these projects of cultural studies. My analyses are not organised around a conceptual divide between high and mass culture, as are those cited by Brunt. Rather than literalise and identify audiences as such, I work with reception theory to identify processes of intersubjective meaning that challenge, and are inimical to, identification *per se* as a strategy for social change.

⁵ For instance Iser's "determinate" and "indeterminate" categories, and Jauss's horizon of expectations were read by de Man as "correct perception" and thus as univocal.

For example, the analysis of the contemporary reception of *Orlando* (in Chapter 5) does not construct that group as a cohesive audience, rather, it focuses on the persistent cultural practice of reading in and from automatically acquired gendered positions, and on the way that *Orlando*'s aesthetics in particular sabotage that reflexive practice.

Across the thesis I address the role of the reader, and of reading practices, in rendering subjects intelligible, working with reception theory to consider the intellectual and political implications of an intersubjective epistemology. I examine the conditions necessary for rethinking reading practices; the role of individual and cultural reception for an intersubjective perspective, and the indispensable presence of will (deployed as agency and choice) to facilitate the requisite changes. I focus specifically on Jauss's formulation of "pleasure in understanding" as a key to intersubjectivity. "Pleasure in understanding" is implicit in Nancy's formulation of the subject (above), expressed as freedom: the freedom to come into the presence of existence within a community without a subject. The freedom articulated explicitly by Nancy and implicitly by Jauss, includes agency ("coming into presence"; "pleasure in") and reception of that agency ("understanding"; "within a community"). The "subject" toward which my argument moves is this agency, liberated in its coming into being within a subjectless community of understanding.

The thesis presents an analysis of how subjectivity is conventionally represented through the interrelated identity categories of gender and sexuality. The argument attests that representations of gender and sexual subjectivity in all domains of cultural and intellectual activity remain structured by subject-object relations. Social relations are mediated by the circulation of discourses and by modes of interpretation. Representational inequities are perpetuated by the delusion of gender difference that is the effect of the subject-object structure of subjectivity. I propose that subjectivity is as much an effect of reception as it is of articulation, and that the conditions for intersubjective representations are met in structures of reception. It has been essential to extend my analysis across different disciplinary domains (literature, film, psychology, psychoanalysis, subcultural testimonial, medicine, law, physics) for an examination of those other frames which empower the speech acts of subjectivity in culture. The tangled interrelationships of these domains suggest that analyses of the subject in only one domain run the risk of missing the overlapping sets through which cultural formations of subjectivity are enacted.

Post-feminism

Before outlining the stages of the argument I want to contextualise the feminist politics at the edges of which the argument works. The image commonly invoked to mark shifts in feminist thought is the wave, as in first- and second-wave feminism. The image conjures a (retrospective) notion of continuity, unity of momentum, and convergence of force. It is a consoling if burdensome fiction, when placed alongside what might be described as the current choppy seas of feminisms. Feminism has interacted with key academic discourses around subjectivity. In dialogue with deconstruction and poststructural theories, lesbian and gay studies, queer theory, and postcolonial theory, feminism has been fundamentally rethought as plural, fragmented, ambivalent, and differentiated.⁶ Feminism throughout the 1970s was discernibly divided along lines of liberal, Marxist/socialist and radical feminists. These positions defined women in relationship to men (as equal), or to the state (as structured by class, or by patriarchy). In the 1980s feminism's critical focus divided more clearly along the faultlines between essentialism and constructionism, difference and sameness (still primarily in relation to men), regarding the subject. Emphasis shifted across the 1980s from feminist analyses of femininity in relation to masculinity (equal, different) to the discursive origins of the subject, and the discernible boundaries that differentiate and designate the categories "woman", "man" and relatedly, "lesbian", "gay".

On its way into the 1990s the unitary drive of feminism's second wave collapsed as it broke onto its own dissonance. This is manifest in the proliferation of subject positions taken up within feminisms, to show how women identify as much through indigeneity, colour, language use, such as non-English speaking background (NESB), class, sexual practices, generation, in what is pointedly an inexhaustible range of differentiated positions. A sustaining tension in the newer focus on dissonance is, on one side, the resistance to a fragmentation of positions that implodes feminism altogether; and on the other, a recurrent drive to inclusiveness that can reproduce the universalism against which feminists struggle to assert differences.

Continuing debates around essence and construction have enabled movement between the foundational categories which informed second-wave feminism, and poststructuralist suspicion of such categories. Foundational categories are now more

⁶ *Australian Feminism: a companion* (Caine, ed., 1998) is a useful representation of histories and current complexions of feminism in Australia, canvassing the multiple institutional and conceptual shifts that proceed from and continue to shape feminist discourses and enterprises. The text brings together contestations, inconsistencies, newer boundaries and newer resistances.

often construed as "strategic"; and poststructuralist suspicion is mitigated by recognition of the "real" in contexts where minorities are oppressed on the basis of their identities. Questions of essence and construction focus on the site of "identity"; and the distinction between identities and practices can trouble the distinction between essentialism and constructionism. A conspicuous expression of the tensions between these critical questions came through the figure of the cross-dresser. Potentially a manifestation of the constructedness of gender, enacting a discontinuity between an assigned biological sex and an achieved and congruent gender, the cross-dresser appeared at its most radically potent to represent the very category crisis that critics were elsewhere working to resolve.⁷ Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub introduce their anthology with this observation:

In the 1980s, ambiguities of sexuality and gender assumed a peculiarly interesting position in critical theory, theories of literature, and theories of popular culture. Phenomena such as passive men, sexually aggressive women, gay men and lesbians, heterosexual men who cross-dress, transsexuals, fetishists of various sorts, and women body builders can be interpreted as escaping a binary system of sexuality and gender. (Epstein & Straub, eds, 1992: 4-5)

The identities in their textual line-up are meant to amplify the diversity of cultural investments in the sex/gender system.⁸ Whether or not these exposures of sex/gender as a system are deemed an intervention into the constitutive effects of the system, they notionally denaturalise its terms. If, after structuralism, interpretive strategies congeal on effects not on authors, then negotiating these effects has been the task of current theorists of the sex/gender system whose own practices are constitutively interested in what becomes of the subject in the process of such play. Feminism in particular, as I have suggested, has had to confront in its relatively truncated history the critical problem of the subject for its political projects. This is a persistent question for a politics which draws its momentum from its grounding in a class of identity – the category "Woman", "woman" or "women" – yet which carries out its theoretical work

⁷ This is of course the assertion of Garber (1992) in *Vested Interests: cross-dressing and cultural ambiguity*. The more prominent critical engagements with the cross-dresser include Epstein and Straub, (eds, 1992); Orgel (1989: 7-29); Straub (1992) and Ferris, (ed., 1993).

⁸ The term "sex/gender system" is still deemed recent enough for its users to dutifully cite Rubin (1975) as the origin of its entry into circulation. I take up the term as critics in the fields of sexual politics use it (implicitly and explicitly): as a shorthand reference to gender, sex and sexuality as denaturalised and contested sites of meaning.

by invoking a subject which is by definition a *discursive* construction, as the variations in quotation marks display.

At the close of the twentieth century the term "postfeminism" began to carry institutional weight. Ann Brooks defines postfeminism as

the current state of feminist thinking – the culmination of a number of debates within and outside feminism. Specifically it refers to feminism's intersection with elements of cultural theory, particularly postmodernism, poststructuralism and psychoanalytic theory, as well as with the theoretical and political debates around post-colonialism. (Brooks, 1997: 7)

Postfeminism denotes not an "after" of feminism but a critical engagement with it; "post" implying an ongoing process of transformation and change (Brooks, 1997: 1). It is the intersection of feminism with other anti-foundationalist movements; a critical engagement with patriarchal and imperialist discourses, and with earlier feminist frameworks (1997: 2). Postmodernism can be understood as a wave moving through all social discourses, such that they are not simply distinct categories that mutually inform. Feminism and other social discourses have been part of what has enabled postmodernism to emerge, and have themselves developed through a postmodernising of their critiques. According to this new organisational definition my arguments line up with postfeminism. The prefix does not imply that feminist questions are *passé* or, better, resolved. It is not *post-* because the sophisticating processes of critical theory have surpassed the arguments about masculinity having priority over femininity. It is *postfeminist* because the very processes of identification called on by feminism in order for it to do its work, are significantly complicit in the problems it exists to resolve.

Though strategically I have not written this thesis *as* a feminist (or post-feminist), its critical insights and motivations have come through feminist discourses. If feminism takes its politics from the here-and-now realities that women (and men) are socially constructed and regulated, then the risk of essentialism is necessary and calculated as the means to speak against that construction from within its frame. If this is so, then the risk I take in this thesis is not the risk of essentialism. From the challenge of theorising experience, the risk I take is to think and write from spaces where gender is a discarded delusion.

The argument

Organised into two sections, Section 1 of the thesis deals with representations of gender and sexuality in counter-cultural discourses, where it might be expected that subjectivities resistant to dominant formations are produced. I take for analysis discourses around the counter-cultural practices of cross-dressing, transgenderism and sadomasochism. Each of these domains of practice and identification challenges the congruence of sex, gender and sexuality as the basis of the sex/gender system. Analysis of these domains zeroes in on the claims, by practitioners and theorists alike, that in disrupting the congruence of the sex/gender system, such practices are resistant to the politics and structures of the sex/gender system. Motivated by my earlier question about the possibilities of subjective representation without gender acquisition, my approach to these claims is one of skepticism.

Chapter 1 explores the implications for current critiques of gender that a germinal feminist text, which publicly initiates "men" into "feminism", takes as its motif for this ritual, "cross-dressing". The role of experience and the effects of signs are persistent issues for theorists of gender and sex. Influenced by earlier debates over essentialist and constructionist positions, later accounts of cross-dressing invest heavily in a notion of agential subjectivity without regard for the interpretive practices which are integral to the constitution of the self-avowed subject. The first part of the chapter tackles questions of essentialism and the second part problematises "performance" in articulations and receptions of gendered subjectivity. Judith Halberstam's analysis of the gender fictions played out in two subcultural films about cross-dressed and transgendered subjects implicates the reader fully in the process of gender crossing. However, the issues raised by the wives of transvestite men reveal limits to the effects of Halberstam's construal of gender as a fiction enabling free play. The wives insist on a reconsideration of experience to account for the way that the fictions of gender – in this case transvestite women and congruent women – misread each other with destructive results. In this chapter I build my argument for reconceiving experience, away from the place that guarantees authority, toward the spaces where agency is in motion.

Chapter 2 develops the argument by offering further analysis of counter-cultural representation. Here I closely examine representations of transgenderism in popular cultural and legal contexts. The three-part argument in this chapter begins with receptions of transgenderism in *The Crying Game* and *Paris is Burning*. My question

about both films is this: how can we say whether or not a sex radical representation has succeeded in articulating its radicality? Is it a matter for subjective responses? Is it to be found in the text itself? My criterion is whether the radical subjectivity emerges intelligibly. That is, whether it presents new forms of subjective agency, or whether it is simply collapsed back onto the gender oppositionality of the sex/gender system. Each film represented transgenderists to enormous audiences, to prodigious critical acclaim and with box office success; yet this palpable visibility managed to render the subject positions of the transgenderists in both films *unintelligible*. To address this unintelligibility I locate the films within the contexts of their reception, paying particular attention to the interface of *Paris is Burning* with the Law.

The influence exerted by the Law upon the discursive domain of popular culture forms the basis of the second part of the chapter. If subjective practices are to challenge the sex/gender system beyond the domain of the cultural, they must negotiate successfully the broader public sphere and its interface with the private sphere. To this end I examine judicial reading practices informing decisions in cases involving transsexual identity. Analysis of these legal discourses – and medical support for them – extends to the defining structure of judicial discourse, the place of standing in the constitution of the subject.

In the third part of the chapter I consider Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick's and Butler's arguments around performativity within the linguistic sphere. Sedgwick's argument takes up the empowering force of the institutions of Law and marriage in the conferral of subjectivity. Butler's offers judicial citation as a location for analysis both of the source of authority and its demystification. I complete this argument with analysis of what citation, and performativity generally, fails to address in its efforts to subvert the sex/gender system through self-avowed subjectivity. Through an extension of analysis of the subject to the broader reaches of legal and medical discourse, I expose the vulnerability of self-avowed subject positions to judicial silencing. This denotes the limits to some of the more prominent sex-radical critiques and amplifies the argument for the implication of reading practices to subjectivity.

Chapter 3 addresses the subject-object impulse that governs reading practices and restricts to oppositionality any freeplay with subjectivity. Here I complete my analysis of the organising assumptions and limits of counter-cultural practices, which are too often received optimistically in cultural critique as successfully productive of radical –

or queer – subjectivities; and whose existence threatens to unmask the ineluctability of the oppositional sex/gender system. In particular I address the subject-object relation invoked in the theatrically oppositional and engendered roles within s/m play and examine claims that s/m represents a radical challenge to the sex/gender system. I begin with the “safe” word in s/m, working from its internal limits in order to discern the reach of its radicalism. I explore how the emergence of the modern subject within the framework of desire can inflect discourses of pleasure and sex-radicalism with a masculine cast. I do this through a contextualisation of Foucault’s “interplay of truth and sex” within receptions of Sade and the modern history of the masculine subject, examining the persistent negotiations of sexed subjects with discourses of psychoanalysis.

Though s/m is undoubtedly a marginalised and occasionally outlawed field of sexual practice, its gender games frame it as a field within which hierarchies of the sex/gender system are reproduced for pleasure in the formation of this identity. Situating s/m within a lineage of corporal violence that perpetrates interests of Church and State, this chapter argues that the radicalism informing s/m is motivated by competing forms of masculine identity rather than by a refusal of the constitutive inequities of gender dimorphism. In the broader argument of this thesis that gender identifications are delusory – and transgression of a delusion an impossibility – this chapter contends that far from transgressing the truths of gender dimorphism, s/m practices are most intelligible under the sign of masculine identification. Ritual formation of masculine subjectivity, made visible in the heightened context of s/m, reveals a compulsion to believe in the absolute of authority: this symbolic figure hooks “men” into a lineage of power and meaning. The circulating discourses of s/m form part of the proliferation of sexualities that has been advocated by Butler and many of her followers, but they do not *ipso facto* displace the delusions of gender by which subjects achieve intelligibility.

To overcome the subject-object binary of the sex/gender system requires nothing less than relinquishing the delusion of gender. Section 2 explores forms and functions of intersubjectivity that support the abandonment of the subject-object bind. To this end the argument shifts emphasis from a critique of the misplaced optimism of declaratory subjectivity, to interpretive processes of subjectivity. Several questions arise from the analyses in Section 1: by what reflex or act of will does the subject seek to achieve standing at the cost of acquiring and reciting the laws of gender dimorphism? Whose will sustains the delusions of gender that perpetuate the signifying force of the

sex/gender system? What conditions are necessary to sway reading practices from reflexively representing subjective differences through the controlling lens of gender dimorphism? The different counter-cultural practices meet the limits of their sex/gender radicalism emphatically at the focal point of their reception.

In Section 2 I address the role of the reader, and of reading practices, in rendering subjects intelligible. Relinquishing a subject-object model for subjectivity, I consider the intellectual and political implications of an intersubjective epistemology. I examine the conditions necessary for rethinking reading practices; the role of individual and cultural reception for an intersubjective perspective. Chapter 4 begins a detailed analysis of key questions for reception theory, focussing on Jauss and the influence of Russian Formalism. The argument draws intellectual and contextual parallels between the projects of Russian Formalism, Quantum Physics and Woolf's subjective aesthetic. The three distinct fields converge at the interface of indeterminacy – Formalism's interpretive strategies, Quantum's "Uncertainty Principle" and Woolf's decentred subject – and each posits subjective agency as the organising principle of their field.

The forms that intersubjective processes of text-reception might take, and the political implications of such forms, are questions central to the work of reception theorists. Any critical project that discerns social subversion or political impact through textual aesthetics must take account of the reception of such textual strategies. Reception theory has its own history of negotiations around the problem of enacting intersubjective relations; interarticulations of meaning and reception, that is to say, that in themselves constitute political acts of subjective self-determination. For Jauss, the experience of aesthetic pleasure has two parts. First, the 'unmediated surrender...of the ego to the object' (consistent in all pleasure); second, the bracketing of the object as an aesthetic one (specific to aesthetic pleasure). He describes the process as 'self-enjoyment in the enjoyment of something other' and thus a movement between subject and object (32). Through reintroducing a democratising notion of pleasure in reception theory Jauss begins to account for – if not name – the process of intersubjectivity.

Having begun to sketch the move from subject-object to intersubjective relations through this chapter I build on the intersubjectivity nascent in reception theory with work on the subject that was implicit also in the paradigmatic shifts in physics. Around the time Woolf wrote *Orlando*, physicist Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle

(HUP) newly defined probability as the underlying property of all matter. I explore the radical implications of the HUP, for which physicists themselves recognised serious philosophical consequences. The benefit of engaging with quantum thought on states of existence at the subatomic level is its consideration of the interface between matter and energy. At the microscopic level, "things" as we might normally regard them, are never just "things" and they can be encountered as matter and movement. From here we could imagine how a politics of the subject might no longer proceed from the certainty of designation. The materialism that has come to prevail in debates around gender and sexuality fixes sites for those positions to speak from within subject-object relations. And yet from a literal, physical perspective materiality is fundamentally challenged at its very basis in uncertainty. The subject comprises a mind that has no space-time boundaries in a body that does, only as a matter of probability, and both are mediated through signs. Taking this on board we can imagine an emancipatory politics that need not insist for its credibility on the truth of distinct and discretely identified subjects.

Whatever their respective motivations and politics, it is through this problem that I link the moment of Einstein's relativity (1915), the modernist processing of this newer understanding of universal momentum as undecidable – in Heisenberg's term, "uncertain" – and Woolf's exploration of subjectivity through modernist formal experimentation. Through these associations I shape my notion of experience according to intersubjectivity and undecidability. And this is the reading apparatus I bring to Woolf to discern the subjective aesthetics of *Orlando*.

Chapter 5 reconsiders in some detail the beneficial legacies of those debates for a newer conception of intersubjective relations that diminishes the intelligibility of gender dimorphism. As the subject is constituted by representation, analyses of the subject are questions of and for *interpretation*. The modernist inception of quantum thought at the time when Woolf wrote *Orlando* effects a subtle but culturally inevitable paradigmatic shift away from the Newtonian world view to which subject-object relations belong. At the level of the "real" (the observable interactive world of subatomic particles), quantum discovers that neither objects nor subjects have *a priori* existence. Rather, their status as objects or subjects depends on the mode of perception that brings them forward in the first place. The replacement of the scientific metaphor of material objectivity by the metaphor of wave relations conditioned by indeterminacy (the HUP), provides the broader cultural basis for a legitimate focus on perspective

(positionality) that allows Woolf's aesthetic to model intelligibly a subjective representation that advances from subject-object relations to intersubjectivity. The broader cultural implication of this shift is a recognition of the delusion of gender as the foundation of intelligible subjectivity.

Through a close reading of *Orlando* I consider the influence on Woolf of the circulating discourses of uncertainty within physics and their wider application to subjectivity. Uncertainty as the organising principle of the text is signalled from the opening sentence to reveal that pronouns and clothes and subjectivity are not to be congruent in this text about a boy who becomes a woman without rupturing agential subjectivity through the change.

Reading the final chapter of *Orlando* against notions of wave-particle states and the uncertainty principle, I contend that the aesthetics of Woolf's text are continuous with the broader paradigmatic shift in the sciences away from the certainty of materiality toward the indeterminacy that conditions subjective agency and intersubjective relations. Working at several of the text's compositional levels I identify the way desire structures the text's narrative, its model of subjectivity, and its projected reception. The second half of the chapter presents analysis of a selection of reviews comprising the actual reception in 1928 of *Orlando* to examine the role of will in activating "pleasure in understanding".

In the final chapter I discuss the feminist reception of Woolf which initially sought a feminist subject within her texts and accused Woolf of androgyny where that subject was lacking. Feminist receptions of Woolf have been predominantly organised conceptually around the subjective aesthetic Woolf's texts offer feminism. Woolf's own political aesthetics, however, have proven to be an obstacle to this quest. I explore later feminist responses that understood that the critique of the subject in Woolf is in fact crucial to her gender politics; and I consider more recent critical receptions of *Orlando* as camp or queer, that gesture toward address in analysis of the text. Returning to correspondence between Woolf and Sackville-West I investigate the unquantified desire that underwrites the radical subjective aesthetics of *Orlando*. I argue that the desire motivating the text provides the conditions for the model of intersubjectivity in the character of Orlando and that the difference between subject-object and intersubjective relations is "pleasure in understanding". In the final part of the chapter I consider more recent arguments around what might constitute feminist

structures of address. The structures of address through which new forms of narrative and subjectivity find expression, invoke in their alliance of pleasure and address the "pleasure in understanding" that underwrites the projects of reception theory, and of Woolf, in the formation of intersubjective relations.

SECTION 1

1 CROSS-DRESSING AND SUBJECTIVITY: READING IN ESSENCE

there is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them
(Woolf, 1928: 180)

In *Orlando* Woolf attributes to the nameless and generic narrator-biographer mutually exclusive pronouncements regarding the constitution of the subject through gender and sex. Following Orlando's change of sex the biographer states: 'Orlando had become a woman – there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity' (Woolf, 1928: 133). The pronoun designating Orlando slides from masculine – 'as he had been' – to indeterminate – 'their future...their identity' – and later settles 'for convention's sake' on the feminine. The indication that Orlando's future will change as a result of the sex change situates Orlando within a system of signs: it is not her consciousness that has altered by the change – her memory is continuous (133) – but cultural interpretations of her. Reception of Orlando will 'alter their future'.

The motivation for Woolf's treatment of sex, gender and sexuality in *Orlando*, the text's subjective aesthetic, cultural context and variant receptions, are addressed in Section 2 of this thesis. Section 1 locates contemporary debates around sex, gender and sexuality within purportedly counter-cultural discursive realms, to analyse the limits of the radicalism of performative practices and theories of gender. Here I cite the gender "debates" in *Orlando* as a frame for this chapter's analysis of the semiotics of gender in the trope of the cross-dresser.

When Orlando has experienced life as a woman for some time the biographer reconsiders: 'Her modesty as to her writing, her vanity as to her person, her fears for her safety all seems to hint that what was said a short time ago about there being no

change in Orlando the man and Orlando the woman, was ceasing to be altogether true' (179). The biographer proceeds to analyse the situation. First is the view that clothes 'wear us and not we them', with recourse to the photographs as supporting evidence, 'So, having now worn skirts for a considerable time, a certain change was visible in Orlando, which is to be found if the reader will look at plate 5, even in her face' (180). This view, whereby cultural truths of gender are interpellated and re-uttered, is then passed over for a view of subjectivity defined by congruity of gender with biological sex. 'The difference between the sexes is, happily, one of great profundity. Clothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath. It was a change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of a woman's dress and of a woman's sex' (181). According to this argument Orlando was not a woman simply because of her sex, but because of some unnamed 'change in Orlando' *prior* to sex and gender which determined her choice of both. This is further confused by the explanation that 'Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what is above' (181).

The confused logics of sex and gender are elaborated by absurd examples of the vacillation in Orlando: 'if Orlando was a woman, how did she never take more than ten minutes to dress? ... She rode well and drove six horses at a gallop over London Bridge. Yet again, though bold and active as a man, it was remarked that the sight of another in danger brought on the most womanly palpitations' (181-82). And so, puzzled by the proliferation of indeterminate examples, the biographer concedes that Orlando's gender at this time 'cannot now be decided' (182). The undecidability of Orlando's gender, and the emphasis on her experiences of gendered subjectivity, inform much of what is pleasurable in the text. This chapter is concerned with the circularities of meaning generated by anxieties around such undecidability. It considers the shifting grounds beneath attempts either to repress or to overdetermine the role of experience in gendered subjectivity. The first part of the chapter tackles questions of essentialism, and the second part problematises "performance" in articulations and receptions of gendered subjectivity.

1 ESSENTIALS OF GENDER AND SUBJECTIVITY

I begin chapter by pitting competing discourses around gender against the experiences that silently power those discourses. I consider first the terms by which men were institutionally initiated into feminism through the trope of the cross-dresser, and the confusion around essential and constructed subjectivities elicited by such a move. I

consult sexological research on transvestite men to elaborate the assumptions around gender and identity informing those debates. In response to the suppression and distortions of "experience" in those discourses – and through reference to debates around essentialism that were conducted around the moment of the entry of men into feminism – I argue for a reconceptualisation of experience in the functioning of gendered subjectivity.

The moment where feminism came up against the binary of essentialism and constructionism, and negotiated it through the trope of cross-dressing, extends from the publication of *Men In Feminism* (Jardine & Smith, eds, 1987) to the momentum that carried forward its central problematic. Before it became a subject of and for cultural studies, cross-dressing was already inflected, through this moment, as a dubious or transitional phase in the context of gender disputation. In the notion of cross-dressing at that moment, was an implicit preference for integral or discrete categories of gender, without which crossing made no sense.

1.1 The Motif of Cross-Dressing

The essay which most rhetorically orchestrated the moment where feminism negotiated the binary of essentialism and constructionism through the trope of cross-dressing was Elaine Showalter's 'Critical Cross-Dressing: Male Feminists and the Woman of the Year' (Jardine & Smith, eds, 1987). Although published elsewhere and earlier (*Raritan*, 1983) the editors included it in their text because they deemed it 'perhaps the first to try to take stock of a certain brand of "male feminism"' (116). Anything designated a "first" is invested with expectations and responsibilities. My enquiry here is prompted by the question: What implications are there, for ongoing critiques of gender, that a foundational text – a text which publicly initiates "men" into "feminism" – takes as its motif for this ritual, "cross-dressing"?

Showalter's essay acknowledges the novelty and complexity of a situation where a politics and discourse created by women from senses of anger and injustice at being oppressed on the basis of their sex and gender, is taken up by those who had been seen largely as being the oppressors, and a once-removed audience for feminism. Showalter receives some of the contemporary feminist articulations by men critics as 'both gratifying and unsettling' (1987: 117). Her ambivalence might signify the risky coming-into-institutional-being of feminism around the moment of this complaint. A comment reproduced on the back of the book refers to 'the now impressive and widely recognized body of feminist writing'. Though a pitch, the comment records a sense of discovery of feminism's institutional *cogito*: feminism has arrived. This is not the

same as designating 1987 and this text as the birth date and place of academic feminism. Feminism's collocations and self-identifications are perhaps more useful – and discernible – than its origins. But the text is an important figuring of feminism where, in this syncopation of its histories and projected futures, the subject is the elided term, because it is the point of departure; and it is conspicuously gendered.

Showalter frames her analysis of the emergence of so-called male feminism with some questions: '[i]s male feminism a form of critical cross-dressing, a fashion risk of the 1980s that is both radical chic and power play? Or is it the result of a genuine shift in critical, cultural and sexual paradigms, a break out of the labyrinth of critical theory?' (1987: 120). The structure of the questions here oppose "cross-dressing" to "genuine", and she draws her troping of cross-dressing from a parallel phenomenon in popular culture, 'serious female impersonation' (120). Inevitably, with over a decade's feverish critical work in the areas of gender and sexuality since Showalter's essay, her critical assumptions are on shakier ground. However, it is often the case that the motivations that are evident when a newer critique (such as hers on men in feminism) emerges, do not always drop away as the debates shift over time, but go underground. The benefit of looking again at Showalter's essay, and others in the text, is that the emotional and political stakes around the question are quite evident. As a kind of primal scene in the contests between women, men, and feminists, to reproduce feminist discourse, the text is a heightened instance of the issues that inform gender politics. These motivations (defensiveness, anger, contradictory claims, threats, power plays) have not necessarily been abandoned for more critically self-aware positions, and can illuminate contemporary versions of these debates.

Without making explicit her appeal to experience as a ground for the identification "woman", Showalter reads *Tootsie*, and Dustin Hoffman's role as Dorothy Michaels, as evidence that acting "as" a woman is more readably a speaking for than a listening to. Under pressure from the emergent alliance of feminism and deconstruction, she holds the "experience" card close to her chest: 'Derrida and Lacan have for some time used woman as the wild card, the joker in the pack who upsets the logocentric and phallogocentric stack of appellations, and a number of brilliant young feminist critics...have made common cause with deconstructionist theory' (1987: 124). She provides an ultimatum for the feminist position, in relation to deconstructionists, to the problem of hierarchical binaries such as man/woman. The choice for feminists is between 'the reformist position of sexual equality, which denies difference, or with the radical position which asserts the difference, the power and superiority of the feminine' (124). Their 'style and voice' will depend on their choice. Her opposition between

equality feminists and the superior feminine lays bare the persistent reach of categorical hierarchies, and the manner in which they are reproduced in contexts that purport to resolve them. Moreover, in Showalter's insistence on the difference position, there is a vivid reminder of the larger and longer cultural battles by women to take up speaking positions in the public and institutional realm. Clearly for feminist women feminism has held the promise of different and sometimes contradictory emancipatory goals. Where feminist critiques of Showalter resist her humanist appeal to identity politics on the basis of the universalism that it reproduces, support for her position is motivated by the conviction that sameness collapses the voices of women into the voice of patriarchy and that difference ruptures the monologicistic veneer that impersonates those it oppresses.

Showalter's essay considers whether a man can be in feminism in the position of the genuine, and not in the devalued position of cross-dressing. From the outset the role of men's participation in feminist discourses is thus regulated by an opposition posed between biology and sociality, mediated by the hidden term "experience". Showalter answers the question of how men can be provisionally in feminism through Jonathan Culler's essay. She treats his deconstructive program for reading as a woman as an attempt to read as a feminist, whereby men can do feminist criticism without impersonating women. This 'must involve a confrontation with what might be implied by reading as a man and with a questioning or a surrender of paternal privileges' (1987: 127). Showalter turns the position of 'writing as a woman' as it is variously adopted by Culler and Terry Eagleton (and metaphorically, by Hoffman) as a mirror to their respective masculine selves. In this way Eagleton's reading of Lovelace's eighteenth-century anxiety about the feminising activity of writing becomes Eagleton's own Marxist anxiety about writing in contrast to the masculinising effects of revolutionary action. By possessing feminist criticism, he becomes the phallic woman described by Robert Stoller as the apotheosis of the transvestite self.¹ At the close of her piece is a tense exchange between them. Eagleton's response to Showalter is an allegory about self-righteousness in identity politics. Showalter retorts that he has refused her topic, and she insinuates a homosociality in his text: 'I will leave the story of Terry and Jeremy for others to consider' (132). Her suggestion that Eagleton's 'critical cross-dressing' enacts a production of masculine subjectivity at the expense of feminine

¹ In Stoller's psychoanalytic account the male transvestite imagines himself a more perfectible woman than a biological female, yet through his ambivalence he retains his link to the Symbolic: he 'gets great pleasure in revealing that he is a male-woman... The pleasure in tricking the unsuspecting into thinking he is a woman, and then revealing his maleness (e.g. by suddenly dropping his voice) is not so much erotic as it is proof that there is such a thing as a woman with a penis'. Cited in Jardine and Smith (eds, 1987: 123).

subjectivity rehearses a critical commonplace.² But its motivation is the apprehension of asymmetry in the social force fields of masculinity and femininity.

The asymmetric positioning of the genders in the sex/gender system predominates in discussion across many of the contributions to *Men In Feminism*. Because they are differently cast in that prescribed scene of gender, men and women, the argument goes, will express different epistemologies of gender. Their relation to one another in this context will not be metaphoric (not collapsible, isomorphic, analogic) but metonymic. But the problems set into circulation by this formulation go unanswered. From where can those relations be read? Does avowing a subject position guarantee that the subject speaks from that position? This last question is implicitly affirmed by the title, *Men in Feminism*, which enacts the exclusion of "men" from "feminism" semantically, opposing "men" typographically to "feminism" through the provocative use of "in".

In her contribution to the debate Meaghan Morris talks about 'something deeply embarrassing, and inhibiting, about the title' and how 'the embarrassment congeals upon the odd word "in", blocked between two nouns to produce an apparently spatial – indeed, territorial – problem for feminism, but in terms that make that problem only thinkable as an action problem for men. So what can a woman say?' (1987: 178). Reading from a less hidden notion of lived experience in her feminist politics, Morris considers the topic 'only intelligible as an *effect* of institutionalization as it works in particular contexts' (179) and as a general proposition, is of little specific relevance to women. Insofar as the topic of men in feminism is contrived for negotiating professional rights within an institutional context, it is separate from feminist concerns: 'Men have no business in feminism, when they've nothing *but* business therein' (180). Morris's frustration with the topic does not suggest that institutional territoriality, economics and feminism are distinct issues. Rather, when the highly charged problem of speaking positions threatens to fall into solipsism, she contextualises the discussion

² In contrast to this position Straub (1992), in her analysis of cross-dressing in eighteenth-century theatre, re-orientates the "masculine gaze" from its apparent position as subject into an object for analysis to show that 'the gaze is not the product of a stable position, a clearly defined and unchanging "place" or subjectivity' and that 'it is a process of struggle for power between different versions of masculinity, not the inherent right of some monolithic Masculinity'. This approach is motivated by a frustration with the paralysing projection of masculinity as a totalising technology that oppresses other gender positions. Straub reads particular playtexts alongside autobiographies of players to illustrate the incompleteness of subjection in this particular historical narrative and argues that one can 'exploit this incompleteness within the politics of one's own reading' (1992: 173). In this reading cross-dressing is transgressive of the sex/gender system. It offers a way around the problem of totalising power but cannot address the limited impact such circulation of play has on the contextualisation of power relations that generate the need for it.

as discussion, and questions whom the topic addresses. The topic's relevance becomes clear only when the importance of reception is remembered in the context of speaking.

What embarrasses Morris is handled by Paul Smith in an ironic appeal to phallic metaphors. Smith makes explicit the convention that the pronomial "man" preemptively violates the space of "woman" (here collapsed with "feminist"):

That penetration is often looked upon with suspicion: it can be understood as yet another interruption, a more or less illegal act of breaking and entering, entering and breaking, for which these men must finally be held to account. Perhaps the question that needs to be asked, then, by these men, with them, for them, is to what extent their irruption (penetration and interruption) is justified? is it of any political use to feminism? to what extent is it wanted? (1987: 33)

For Smith the place for men is in feminism's margins as a sign of the materiality of sexual difference – from the consequences of which feminism is seen as deriving its motivating energy – and to subvert the laws of its discourse (39). Here the pronoun (the "he" that designates "man") and a phallic metaphoric both work to effect the notion of gender difference: in this economy the value of the currency of difference fluctuates wildly (difference as exclusive of "men", as inclusive of others etc). What stands as the sign of difference (phallus/pronoun) directs the terms of the negotiations possible. Elizabeth Weed makes a similar case against Andrew Ross, where Ross argues for a separation of the natural and the constructed and swerves across both poles of the universal/particular binary. According to Weed, in the same text (72), 'when arguments from the universal cease to work for whatever historical reason, there is always recourse to the particular, to the rights of the individual as against totalizing forces. And as long as the circulation of power remains closed, the ends are the same. Witness the recent phenomenon of accusations of reverse discrimination'. Peggy Kamuf's essay carries her response to the embarrassment of the title in its title, "Femmeninism", placing "men" typographically in "feminism", shifting the resonance from the difference of bodies and their sexed activities to the pronomial gendering of speaking positions. The effect of deflecting the spoken and unspoken movements of the debate onto a specifically textual mode does not, however, do away with essentialism. On the question of how gender can be perpetrated by language alone she notes:

Fortunately (but also unfortunately), a certain organization of rules and exclusions, a whole institutionalized, incorporated legal apparatus of convention is in place to provide some

measure of certainty. But what are we supposed to think about the certainty of the "I" as conventionally structured, for example by the procedural rules of the MLA convention? (78)

Debates around essentialism versus deconstructed subject positions can be productive of tactical politics in these kinds of institutionalised settings. But can one simply talk of enacting an essential or an anti-essential strategy and then proceed to do so, without reproducing a rather more conventional appeal to authorial intention? Can simply stating one's position textually account for the conventions which prescribe it?

A test applied to transvestite men to ascertain their place on a scale of masculinity and femininity emerged from the same influential assumptions of sexology invoked by these arguments. The following discussion examines the shifting grounds of these assumptions through an exploration of the bizarre attempt to ground the transvestite's gender. The test and results form part of a recent sexological analysis of the interrelations of sex and gender, V. L. Bullough and B. Bullough's *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (1993). 'The culmination of thirty years of research' the text 'not only surveys cross dressing and gender impersonation throughout history and in a variety of cultures, but also examines the medical, biological, psychological, and sociological findings that have been presented in the modern scientific literature.'³ The projected audience of the text includes researchers of sex and gender, feminists, gays, lesbians, nurses, physicians, the general public. The authors between them share senior positions in the Schools of Nursing and of History and Social Studies at the State University of New York. The text thereby represents a comprehensive review and analysis of the broad interplay of competing institutional discourses, in the humanities and sciences, around gender, sex and the crossings within and between them. It chooses to understand this complexity, much as Showalter's leading piece in *Men in Feminism* does, through the function of the cross-dresser.

1.2 Transvestites On Gender

The attempt (mentioned above) to measure degrees of purported attributes of femininity and masculinity as they manifested in cross-dressers was made in 1975. A group of transvestite "patients" was tested using the Attitude Interest Test which defined a gender in bipolar terms of mutually exclusive masculinity and femininity. The analyst tested what was described as 'a patient population of 117 cases including homosexual, transvestite, and other patients with psychological problems' (Bullough & Bullough, 1993: 298). These results were compared to control groups made up of the hospital staff. 'Transvestites were the most feminine, with women from the hospital staff

³ Comments taken from the back cover of the book.

scoring as less feminine than the transvestites. The [male] homosexual control group was on the masculine side but low in comparison to hospital workers'. "Transvestite" is used both by the authors and those whom they cite, to refer to men who cross-dress, with women who cross-dress deemed so small a minority as to not require a gender qualifier in the use of the term "transvestite" when designating men. The mutual exclusivity of the bipolar model – 'individuals who possessed one set of characteristics were assumed to be deficient in the other...so...that one could not be both assertive and gentle.' (298) – was critiqued by feminist analysts and the test was reworked to accommodate overlaps in masculinity and femininity. The test was newly applied to a transvestite group whose members still scored higher on femininity than on masculinity. Some transvestites agreed to take the test again while cross-dressed and recorded higher femininity scores. This was held to support the idea that some transvestites take on different attitudes when they are cross-dressed.

Despite its lack of critical rigour in terms of later gender theories, the approach of testing cross-dressers to unearth specific gender attributes, was modified rather than left behind and Bullough and colleagues reported similar findings when they tested transvestites against three different control groups: homosexual men, male to female (m2f) transsexuals and local residents with undisclosed sex/gender orientations. Each of the three "sexual minorities" scored lower on the masculinity scale and higher on the femininity scale than the control group (1993: 299). 'The transsexuals were the most feminine, but the group that was lowest in masculinity was the gay control group. The transvestites fell between the external control group and the transsexuals on both attributes'. The test was undertaken ostensibly to "understand" the identificatory processes that go on for sexual minorities, and for cross-dressing men in particular, but the conclusion drawn by the researchers reveals a motivation to resituate the cross-dressed man as a regulator rather than a disrupter, of gender truths: 'the transvestite life-style protects the masculine persona by isolating the feminine attributes and allowing them expression when the subject is cross-dressed' (299).

There is no surprise at finding a discursive regime, here sexology, constructing the "objects" it subjects to purportedly neutral analysis. Clearly the test confirms nothing but the degree to which tested subjects are capable of and willing to avow the already agreed characteristics of the gender they wish to adopt. The test allows for a double avowal: the transvestite (who is so identified precisely because s/he chooses to avow an "opposite" gender role) chooses in the test to reproduce the assumptions that support that gender affiliation. This double performance proves the point for sexology: if women do not always answer the demands of a femininity which precedes them then

the transvestite man functions to salvage the potential disjunction between women and femininity. That is, the transvestite proves that femininity is not subject to reconceptualisation. Femininity is a constant – it is just that males sometimes do it better than females.

The authors explain that the term “transvestite” is applied only to men not women ‘because the male club movement and, consequently, the DSM-III-R does not include them’. According to Stoller transvestism implied erotic attachment or “fetishistic arousal” to clothes of the other sex, and that this erotic element was significantly more common in men than women transvestites. A reason routinely produced is that women can wear more items of men’s clothing than men can wear of women’s and that is why in the contemporary climate f2m cross-dressing is less visible and less a problem. The authors disagree: ‘Once women cross over the imaginary line that separates those who toy with men’s clothing and those who violate gender norms by impersonating men, the punishments for this violation are similar to those meted out to men...the major difference seems to be that only a few women focus on the erotic element in the clothing’ (1993: 307). The authors’ care in considering the multiple factors informing sex, gender and cross-dressing has not extended to investigate the differing levels of freedom available to men and women to articulate active sexual desire, and particularly, marginal or fetishistic versions of desire. Moreover a persistent reflex to ground oppositionality in gender underwrites the analysis:

Because the women who cross-dress seem less unhappy with themselves than male transvestites [less claim to want sex reassignment surgery, or to want a penis, or to be a man], they have been slower to organize support groups and have remained virtually invisible not only to the general public but even to sexologists and other scholars. This quieter approach seems traditionally feminine. Perhaps women are more “feminine” in their approach to violating gender norms than men are. (307)

From that last sentence at least, it is clear that “femininity” and “masculinity” become fixed in oppositional relation to each other as they underwrite the discourse which investigates them. This has to do with the displacement of the very terms being interrogated at the moment – in the discursive constitution – of their interrogation. This is not to propose that we can go to the place outside of these terms, unmarked by them, and discuss them behind their back, as it were. It does mean that when we think we have the thing at hand *at hand* (when we think that an instant of cross-dressing is a presentment of a gender-truth-in-transformation) what we have instead is a synecdochal operation of the sex/gender system. A system which is not only *not* exhausted by

(subverted by the subversive treatment of) the part brought in to stand for its imagined whole (clothes brought in to stand for gender), but whose operations of oppositional differentiation are unproblematically mimicked or re-performed by those utterances.

The authors re-inscribe gender stereotypes in a flippant gestural disinterest which is also an inability to account for the relative invisibility of women in the sexologist's discourse of transvestism. They could have chosen to investigate this fact against their assumptions. Instead they reproduced those assumptions, and effectively held women to account for their under-representation in the "men's club" of sexology. This invisibility is intrinsically linked with reading practices. The authors make little distinction between heterosexual and homosexual transvestites, so their question is not one of sexuality/object choice but of relational identity; the relation between an idea of "masculinity" and an idea of "femininity". If this is taken into account for argument's sake, then in cathecting toward clothes, in taking erotic pleasure from the proximity of their body to the textures and contours of over-determinedly "feminine" clothing, it could be said that transvestite men take the sign (feminine clothes) of the thing (woman) for the thing itself; whereas, in the apparent absence of erotic attachment, the women transvestites take the sign (masculine clothes) for a sign (masculinity). Psychoanalysis influentially tells its own circular stories of the differently gendered needs of the differently sexed bodies. However, if the practices of m2f transvestites and f2m transvestites are not symmetric then neither can a symmetry be inferred from the relative positions of "women" and "men" in the sex/gender system.

This apprehension of asymmetry, derived from the gender *experiences* of each critic, drives most of the arguments in *Men in Feminism*, though they do not develop a vocabulary for articulating experience within a theoretical context. Experience is the repressed of those debates that returns in quite petty forms: in, for instance, the snitching between Showalter and Eagleton, the laboured play with metaphors of, or analogies to, rape by various of the "men" in the debate, including Smith, Ross and Eagleton. The question driving the debate, yet unaddressed by it, is: how can there be talk about experience in theorised and self-aware ways without yielding to the authority of the experience or repressing it into a destructive force? I address this question through analysis of the essentialist/constructionist binary, to re-conceptualise experience in the constitution of subjectivity.

1.3 Place and Space

Much in the same way as it works in "cross-dressing", the bar between the oppositions essentialism/constructionism is too easily taken for real. It functions there after all to

denote differences between the terms; and that denotation would be unnecessary were the terms in effect distinct and uninhabited by one another. Insofar as the bar marks the separation in invoking the terms as binary, it can be read as doing so in order to emphasise differences *in that context*. To take this difference as fixed opposition is to overproduce the effect of the bar, and to paradoxically undo the function of its presence there. Taking as important the unremarkable critical consensus that terms inhabit each other, Diana Fuss introduces her analysis of the essentialism/constructionism problem with a note of tedium: 'it may be time to ask whether essences can change and whether constructions can be normative' (1989: 6). Fuss makes a productive intervention into the critical polarisation around essentialism and constructionism at a heightened moment in those debates. Her text went to print soon after the institutional circulation of *Men in Feminism* and around the time that European theories of subjectivity were settling into the American intellectual landscape. As later discussion about Judith Butler's contribution to these issues will make clear, analyses of subjectivity continue to proceed from the polarised positions of essentialism and constructionism. This polarity remains operative, if not always foregrounded, as theorists work toward coming to terms with the persistence of experience as a force of intelligibility in debates around subjectivity.

Fuss contends that essentialism, 'when held most under suspicion by constructionists, is often effectively doing its work elsewhere, under other guises, and sometimes laying the groundwork for its own critique' (1). Her first example of this is in the semantic shift from singular (essences) to plural (differences) descriptors of categories of identification.

The plural category "women", for instance, though conceptually signalling heterogeneity nonetheless semantically marks a collectivity; constructed or not, "women" still occupies the space of a linguistic unity. It is for this reason that a statement like 'American women are "x"' is no less essentializing than its formulation in the singular, 'The American woman is "X"'. The essentialism at stake is not countered so much as *displaced*. (4)

Is this always the case? Where might the semantic shift effect a conceptual shift, and a material shift? The questions raised by Fuss's example make explicit that words are signs first and foremost. What gets done with and to words is what makes for difference. Words have different effects when they are enacted, for instance, as speech acts and when they are interpreted as tropes. The difference between countering essentialism and displacing it, in Fuss's example, is very much a question of context. How signs are taken up in an interpretive context, in the motion between reading and

writing, is a question about how we read. Fuss approaches the problem by introducing a discrimination between types of essences, 'between the ontological and linguistic orders of essentialism' (5), understanding the complicities of each in their debt to essentialism. Emerging in response to the American reception of deconstruction, her argument is effectively weighted toward critiquing the linguistic order of essentialism, reasserting the link of the linguistic to essentialism; and to creating intellectual space for an ontological order of essentialism. The critique is evidently motivated by the inhibiting effects of the paradoxical finality of the claims of deconstruction. Fuss notes the essentialism at work surreptitiously in Derrida's famous deployment of "always already". The term 'frequently appears at those points where Derrida wishes to put the brakes on the analysis in progress and to make a turn in another direction' (15). Its usefulness and danger is that it implies an essence whose self-evidence obviates any need for explication: 'in so doing, it frequently puts a stop to analysis, often at an argument's most critical point' (17). For anti-essentialists to posit essentialism as ineluctably reductive is itself an act of essentialising. Inevitably present, yet not inevitably reductive, the category essential is thus best reconsidered as strategic.

Fuss demonstrates the preoccupation with "place", in the *Men in Feminism* debates, and specifically, with where men stand (in what place) in relation to feminism.

Paul Smith wishes to claim for men the privileged space of displacement, usually reserved in deconstruction for Woman, in order to mark the difference of feminism, the subversive presence within. Stephen Heath speculates that the obsession with place is a male obsession with decidedly phallic overtones: are men "in" or "out" of feminism? Still others, Cary Nelson and Rosi Braidotti, suggest that men have no place (or at least no *secure* place) in feminism; according to this line of thinking, men may need feminism but feminism does not need men. (29)

For Fuss the text raises essentialism as the problem for men "in" feminism and works from an 'unarticulated relation between essence and place'. Yet, she argues, "place" is as much a problem for essentialism as essentialism is for place: 'we should be interrogating not only the place of essentialism but the essentialism of place'(29).⁴ What makes place essential in a sense is its implicit appeal to experience. Experience authorises that subject to occupy that place. Experience, it turns out, is what generates the polarity between essentialism and constructionism. Fuss takes up Scholes' essay in

⁴ A preoccupation with the place of standing, *locus standi*, is not peculiar to the editors and contributors to this text: it is a notion that underwrites the hierarchy of those most powerful institutions of material subjectivity, law courts. The next chapter details more fully how and why particular law courts demand a *locus standi* before a subject is entitled to come before those courts.

Men in Feminism, 'Reading Like a Man', to clarify her position on experience, though she does so explicitly because she finds it a good example of 'the polarization of feminism and deconstruction around the contested sign of essence' (24). Scholes critiques the mastering impulses of deconstruction in its treatment of feminism. His essay problematises the relation between feminism and deconstruction, arguing for a kind of nominal essence or 'logico-linguistic idea of a class of women in order to be effective' (24). He argues that women must in some way be bound as a class in terms of a shared experience of being women, and so deploys experience in an essential way – though he sees that essence as constructing as well as constructed. Fuss, understanding Scholes' notion of experience as grounded in the (female) body, departs from him over this particular point. She rejects experience as the basis for the idea of a class of women. In Scholes' bodily referentiality in 'reading like a man', the "like" sidesteps the essentialist problem of "as" but the essentialism returns in the "man". In reaction to this link of reading to bodies Fuss expresses rhetorical ignorance of what it is to read as or like a woman, but chooses instead to read like a feminist. Implicit in this position is that, whereas feminism is a matter of choice – and thus a political position – being a woman is a matter of imposition. She does not address the contentiousness of this assumption, seeing how for instance if "woman" is not essential, it too can only ever be chosen, rather than "actual". Instead this position leads to her main contention that choice is the basis for the idea of a class of women, and that politics is feminism's essence, the consciously uninterrogated term in her argument (36). Hers is a clever argument that exposes essence as a recalcitrant component in gender debates, and then strategically deploys "politics" as a respectable kind of essence for her argument. I take from it two points in particular for my argument. The first is that experience persists in arguments around subjectivity and is best acknowledged, and incorporated into any analysis as a forceful component. The second is that experience need not be grounded in anything, as such, and to assume it inheres in the body (as Scholes does) and reject it on that basis (as Fuss does) fails to address it fully as a sticking point. With more distance now than Fuss had from the intellectual spill effected by deconstruction, experience can be reintroduced, and radically reconceived, as precisely of that space where there can be no essence. A last look at Fuss will clarify this point.

Not until the final chapter of Fuss's book is the problem of experience the focal point of her discussion. From her perspective as an academic in Women's Studies she notes that experience has a particularly charged function in the Women's Studies classroom and she sees essence circulating most problematically as a privileged signifier in the classroom context, as 'the authority of experience' (113). Fuss refers to "experience"

through Althusser, for whom "lived" experience is not a given but is an experience of ideology in relation to the real (114); and through Aristotle for whom experience was a more immediate and thus reliable means of knowing. She affirms the ideological (Althusserian) notion of experience in her text, but brings the Aristotelian notion to the class, defined there as the "politics of experience" (114). In the classroom context the circulation of identities grounded in the authority of experience are a form of "insider trading". Following Said she argues how identities in this context can entrench ignorances rather than disseminate knowledge, defend rather than interpret experiences, provide opportunities to speak at the cost of silencing others (115). This authority is drawn from a correspondence between the speaker and their biological body. Experience can be used, as in the experience of a "real" woman, to 'fend off the entry of men into feminism', and to naturalise the relation between biology and gender. Identity politics can be thus used to affirm a hierarchy of oppression and de-politicise where they claim to be most political. This too is a reminder that the democratic myth of speaking for (on behalf of) is inevitably at best a speaking "as", with the "as" denoting a separation between the speaker and the set of concerns articulated, a gap or space, not a self-identical truth.

Fuss allows that truth and experience need not be equated and that, while they can silence, appeals to experience can also facilitate into discussion otherwise silent students: 'How are we to negotiate the gap between the conservative fiction of experience as the ground of all truth-knowledge and the immense power of this fiction to enable and encourage student participation?' (118). Her response is to work with a post-Althusserian position that requires a theorisation of the essentialising place from which subjects speak and a deconstruction of those places: to historicise the contexts in which we speak as subjects. Fuss's solution may work more specifically within classroom dynamics but it is difficult to imagine in practice, for when experience is articulated categorically it is no longer experience (present-acting consciousness) as such, but description and stasis. Fuss implies that experience equates to empiricism, but this is only so in its categorical articulations. It is not "experience" but the assumption of authority in the name of experience, that is empiricist. Experience, understood instead as engagement with or relatedness to, might form a more accurate view of how subjectivity interrelates with experience. "Experience" can be better applied, not as productive of material solidity (essence), not as the devalued notion of irreducible truth nor content, but as the perspective of the subject. "Experience" can index a state of subjectivity that is agential, in motion and as such, empty. Emptiness represents the impossibility of essence, and the situatedness of that state as a state of being. Being too can be taken, not as metaphysical presence or absolute but, as it

suggests, as a present participle. It can index a moment-to-moment action of consciousness that is the distinct domain of the subject, and marks out, not an essential subject (which would become thereby an object) but subjectivity as process. Experience in this sense is the awareness or consciousness of the subject's transience; its arising and dissolution in momentary encounters with the material and energetic domains. It is not at all the same "experience" which, in Fuss's argument, is 'underwritten by a metaphysics of presence' (114).

For Fuss, the limits of "experience" as a useful term for subjectivity are defined by equating experience with truth: 'Belief in the truth of Experience is as much an ideological production as belief in the experience of Truth' (114). Having critiqued the contributors to *Men in Feminism* for a preoccupation with "place", Fuss randomly interplays "place" and "space" in her own references to subjectivity in this last chapter. Yet, place signifies materiality, where space signifies absence of materiality. The seeming randomness of her use of both space and place suggests an unarticulated ambivalence in her interpretation of experience. It is easier now, perhaps, than it was in Fuss's context, to make the leap from a concept of the "place" of subjectivity to the ungrounded "space" of subjectivity. Where the place of subjectivity was marked by identity, by a materialist politics, the space of subjectivity is a question of "experience". Bearing the poststructuralist repudiation of "untheorised" notions of agency and free will, experience can reintroduce subjective agency: an agency that is, for sure, imbricated with institutional, semantic, disciplinary pressures, but which is still agency as a state of action/reaction. Experience in this sense is not something that happens to the subject. The subject is not the chronological effect of experience. Rather, the moment-to-moment experiencing consciousness, choosing and negotiating its interfaces, constitutes subjective agency. The subject reassembles knowledge corporeally, intellectually, emotionally, in relation to its experiencing of the world in a constant interfluxing with material and energetic forces. This movement is not a movement between discrete materially knowable institutional "places" – the institutionally determined positions of, for example, author, reader, teacher, that Spivak allows for the subject in her reading of Mahasweta Devi's 'Breast-Giver' (related by Fuss, 1989: 34). It is not the movement discernible within a Newtonian cosmology but the movement of a quantum physical world.⁵

⁵ Chapter 4 works closely with subjectivity in terms of Woolf's aesthetics in *Orlando* and of quantum physics' newer formations of subjectivity. Still, the paradigmatic shift from the Newtonian materialist ("clockwork") view of the physical world to the quantum mechanical (relativity, uncertainty, subjectivity) gives the point its own force in the context of this chapter.

A productive account of subjectivity will emphasise fluid boundaries rather than fixed – even strategically – places. “Experience” is not itself the problem here. The problem is the context in which it is bandied about as a ground zero of standing, as the right to speak over an other, to impose one’s subjectivity against an other’s “objectivity”. Although choice, too, can lapse into presumptions of individual free will, subjects are constantly compelled to choose in the dynamics of text and reading. Experience in these debates is never articulated in this sense but is most intelligible when understood as the experience of *being read as* (as women, feminists, men in feminism). In other words, we can never know what it is to *be* a woman, a lesbian, a man; but some of us well know what it is (how it feels, what it means) to *be read as*, and objectified by, one or some of those categories. Such objectification can have materially positive or negative, or both, effects on subjectivity. But being *read as* is never the same thing as being. If “being” is an unattainable notion, a metaphysical fiction, for argument’s sake, then it is crucial to separate “being” from “being read as” in the context of gender debates. This moves those arguments beyond the deadlock of “experience” (who is and who is not authoritatively a woman/man?) to a productive use of experience in relation to our acts of reading and being read as.

2 PERFORMANCES

The deployment of “experience” that I propose does not equate “being read as” with strategic identity categories. It is a deliberate shift away from identity categories (and the objects of knowledge) toward a focus on reading practices and ways of knowing; on fictioning, rather than fictions. This implicit negation of the possibility of strategic identity categories makes political and intellectual sense when read alongside the receptions of Judith Butler’s quite radical and now institutionalised text *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. The receptions of that text exemplify how difficult it is to conceive of a cultural practice that can successfully deploy identity categories as simply strategic, without lapsing into the mistake of essentialism. As will be evident, to alter the static and hierarchical effects of identity categories is not a simple question of de-essentialising categories; rather, it calls for a consciousness of and change from the way reading practices seek out categories. Following analysis of Butler’s performativity, and receptions of her argument, in the second part of this chapter, I consider the limitations of performativity through mis/readings of f2m gender performances. Returning to the trope of cross-dressing, I consider some receptions of transvestite “performance” by wives of men who cross-dress, to explore persistent sticking points in the complex relations between experience, gender and power.

2.1 Drag

When Butler introduced her conception of "gender as performance" some of the questions around essentialism seemed resolvable through that logic. However, in 'Critically Queer' she argues against the 'voluntarist account of gender which presumes a subject, intact, prior to its gendering' (Butler, 1993b: 21) which was apparently misinferred by her readers from her conception of gender performativity. This "misreading" must surely indicate, not that most of her readers are careless (or not only that), so much as the tenacious hold of convention on even the most radically motivated of texts. Butler's text's reception cannot be simply attributed to the readers' conventionalism and their volitional defusion of the argument's force; something else must be in operation to reinforce the presuppositions under examination. The *citation* of gender as performative offers radical potential, but *applications* of that kind of thinking to readings of texts and of people might not be the way to ascertain that performativity. In 'Critically Queer' Butler re-consolidates her notion of performativity:

Gender is performative insofar as it is the *effect* of a regulatory regime of gender differences in which genders are divided and hierarchized *under constraint*. Social constraints, taboos, prohibitions, threats of punishment operate in the ritualized repetitions of norms, and this repetition constitutes the temporalized scene of gender construction and destabilization. There is no subject who proceeds or enacts this repetition of norms. To the extent that this repetition creates an effect of gender uniformity, a stable effect of masculinity or femininity, it produces and destabilizes the notion of the subject as well, for the subject only comes into intelligibility through the matrix of gender. Indeed, one might construe repetition as precisely that which *undermines* the conceit of voluntarist mastery designated by the subject in language. (1993b: 21-2)

Is it altogether the case that repetition destabilises the notion of the subject, as Butler asserts here? We know by definition that the subject is an effect of discourse and so can hardly be surprised if it equivocates its productivity and constructedness in its (self) utterance. The destabilisation is not thorough with regard to the apparatus (the constraining forces alluded to by Butler, above) which underwrites the powerful effects of gender hierarchy. Instead, in Butler's phenomenological sense, the object of that destabilising impulse is displaced onto the language conveying that instability. Language both carries and is the effect of that destabilisation, and the intended object is never reached.

There is a distinction to be made between the idea of terms as fixed in relation to truth, and the idea of the truth of their laws as fixity. The man/woman binary may fix the categories currently underwriting specific social relations and power relations, but for those categories to do their destructive work need not depend on the appearance of them as immovable. What happens to our ability to overcome those terms if part of the very insidiousness of their operations is that they shift and slide through discursive regimes, that they can be played with, upturned, practised, critiqued? What if their fluidity serves to multiply the tendrils with which the binary takes discursive hold of our imaginations? Butler allows for this herself when she asserts 'Heterosexuality can augment its hegemony through its denaturalization, as when we see denaturalizing parodies which re-idealize heterosexual norms without calling them into question' (1993b: 22). Are "transgression critics" mesmerised by the semantics of "destabilisation", mistaking the vehicle for the tenor? Dominant culture is evidently not unitary in its operations so resistances must be at the very least multiple.

Butler restates that the heterosexist truth of gender is a contradictory formation of psychic interior and surface presentation:

its undecidability is to be traced as the play between psyche and appearance (where the latter domain includes what appears in words). Further, this will be a "play" regulated by heterosexist constraints though not, for that reason, fully reducible to them. (1993b: 24)

Performance is not the same as performativity, she emphasises (in seven italicised lines of text), as the performance of gender reiterates those norms which 'precede, constrain, and exceed' the performer (1993b: 24). The performed gender 'works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, un-performable' (24). Exactly where the subject might be, what it might be doing or choosing through this, is not at all clear. Indeed, Butler's attempt to account for subjective agency in the context of performativity comes from a reinterpretation of the psychoanalytic concept of melancholia in its application to cross-dressing (in its public staging as drag). In Freud's sense melancholia is an effect of ungrieved loss, where the lost object is inscribed in the psyche (so there is no loss to grieve) 'with the consequence of heightened identification with that Other, self-beratement, and the acting out of unresolved anger and love' (24-5). As a kind of acting out of these emotions, performance dramatises melancholia in terms of the undecidability of gender, in specific relation to sexuality. This is an enabling intellectual move because it provides an account of drag whereby the ideal object of a gender is an unacknowledged loss, acted out.

This is, then, neither a territorialization of the feminine by the masculine, nor an "envy" of the masculine by the feminine, nor a sign of the essential plasticity of gender. What it does suggest is that gender performance allegorizes a loss it cannot grieve, allegorizes the incorporative fantasy of melancholia whereby an object is phantasmatically taken in or on as a way of refusing to let go. (Butler, 1993b: 25)

Butler is anxious that this not be deemed an exemplary paradigm for thinking about homosexuality, though she then parenthetically allows for it. She prefers to see drag in this model as allegorising heterosexual melancholy insofar as it might correspond to an inability to grieve the loss of same-sex desire, an inability caused by a cultural disavowal of that desire in the first place. But what if that loss is not oppositionally matched to specific genders in her model, but to Gender? Following her logic drag could be seen to allegorise not only the foreclosure of homosexual desire (in Butler's use here defined by its objects) and its concomitant ungrievable loss, but the inability to let go of the idea of the idealised object of Gender identity itself. It can represent the loss in advance of achieving a perfect gender fit, in a heterosexualised context which insists on the direct correlation of biology and gender (female therefore woman) in the service of an economy of reproductive sexuality (therefore mother and wife). Drag can thus be read as an individualised expression of a cultural refusal; as a particularised repetition of a cultural logic which is the refusal to relinquish as ideational one of the central conditions of social structuration, the delusion of gender.⁶

Whereas in the *Men in Feminism* debates cross-dressing was a motif that reinforced gender categories as discrete and oppositional, Garber posited the transvestite as a motif of category crisis because it disrupts binarism (it is the return of the repressed norm – of gender ambiguity), and it makes culture possible by marking the subject's entrance into the Symbolic. What is it about the phenomenon of (straight, gay and bisexual) men who dress as women that polarises critics into a reading of it as inevitably either radical or recuperative of gender? Butler develops her reading of drag to suggest that specific heterosexual gender identification is a consolation for the loss of that gender as an object of desire: 'it may well be that what constitutes the sexually unperformable is performed instead as gender identification' (1993b: 25). In this way the heterosexual

⁶ Some of the 'style and voice' to which Showalter referred might be illustrative of this. Ross's invocation of a rapist (the Yorkshire Ripper) as an exemplar of the excesses of identity politics; Eagleton's choice of the Rape of Clarissa and Smith's penetrative metaphors, against Showalter's resistance to men "in" feminism. The angry expressions of these stereotypically gendered positions – masculinised force and feminised resistance – represent the persistence of a gender system whose images and metaphors they cannot finally relinquish. What loss might have been symptomatised in the fantasy that feminism was ever a woman's place?

man identifies with/as the man whose proleptic loss as love object he never grieved and (as in all symmetries of psychoanalysis) ditto for the heterosexual woman. Gender as performance in this sense signifies and symptomatises disavowal (26). But it is not certain that there must be a stable, intelligible gender to ground either hetero or homosexual desire. Butler's logic here locks gender and sexuality into congruence, despite its evident critique of heterosexism, and allows for the presumably unintended conclusion that women who understand themselves as women, for instance, can not be lesbian. In psychoanalysis the relationship between sexuality and gender is entrenched through the mutual exclusivity of identification and desire. While Butler clearly critiques this 'most reductive of heterosexism's psychological instruments' (1993a: 240)⁷ her account of gender here reproduces it. To allow for continuity between identification and desire calls for an understanding of sexual difference *within* homosexuality that, Butler acknowledges, has not yet been adequately theorised. Her argument is productive, though, in its suspicion of the separation of sex and gender (marked in the work of Rubin and Sedgwick). She questions whether the privileging of sexual practice as a means to transcend gender predicates that sexual practice as necessarily fetishistic 'trying to not know what it knows, but knowing it all the same' (1993b: 27). Although her psychoanalytic interpretive experiments do not propose a specific relation between sex and gender, they lead her to call for a reconsideration of sexuality and gender in dynamic relation to each other, not causal nor indistinct, but relational. Choice, in this sense, is not free and distinct but caught up in that relation of gender to sexuality. Performativity is to be read 'not as self-expression or self-presentation, but as the unanticipated resignifiability of highly invested terms' (1993b: 28).

A surprising and unintended effect of Butler's recourse to psychoanalysis is that it reproduces the asymmetry in regard to heterosexuality that psychoanalysis conventionally produces in relation to homosexuality. That is, starting from a queer perspective, Butler's psychoanalysis can account for the problem of heterosexuality, but not for homosexuality. This mirrors the way that psychoanalysis, from an avowedly heterosexual stance, can analyse the "problem" of homosexuality but fails to account for heterosexuality. The risks to intelligibility and subversion, though, of reading against gender fictions through the discourse – psychoanalysis – that so influentially reproduces them, undermine Butler's manoeuvres within it. This is of course a positional assertion: Butler's subversive intent deliberately aims at gender regimes such as psychoanalysis in order to pervert their truths, even if she is not always in control of how they get perverted. I argue, in contrast, that this can be a labour of

⁷ In the later version of 'Critically Queer' in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*.

diminishing returns, and the "misreading" of *Gender Trouble* that she attempts to correct is in part attributable to this.

2.2 Mis/reading Fictions of Gender

The partial misreception of *Gender Trouble* raises the problem of what might be understood as unilateral disengenderment. In order for her readers to get it right, Butler had to re-perform her own text, to keep doing it, keep talking about it. This is a serendipitous continuation of the ideas about performativity that were in the book; as if the argument had to be made not only textually but also extra-textually. It is a clear expression of the persistent problem for gender radicalism: namely, the recognition of it *as such*. If gender is performance, then it requires an audience that knows what is being performed. If it is a fiction, it requires readers to be in the know. To progress the argument beyond my complaint about Butler's labour of diminishing returns, I now consider the role of reception in interventions in the sex/gender system. I begin with a reading of gender play in f2m transgenderism.

In 'F2M: the Making of Female Masculinity' Judith Halberstam offers a creative complication of meanings of gender transgressions. Her argument is set apart from the context of Bullough and Bullough's resignation to the relative invisibility of f2m cross-dressers. We recall that they attributed this to the f2m's 'traditionally feminine ... approach to violating gender norms', rather than to their own gendered assumptions as researchers. Set apart also from most other critics' fascination with m2fs, Halberstam produces close readings of f2ms within a framework in which gender is 'a fiction requiring readers' (1994: 216) and explores the cost of misreading or refusing to read a subject's chosen gender.

Gender fictions in her argument are 'fictions of a body taking its own shape, a cut-up genre that mixes and matches body parts, sexual acts, and postmodern articulations of the impossibility of identity' (Halberstam, 1994: 210). This kind of gender fiction 'refuses the respectability of being named, identified, known' (210). There is always a vast array of people and potential identities that are not intelligible within current taxonomies (211). In support of Garber she asserts 'we are all cross-dressers but where are we crossing from and to what? There is no "other" side, no "opposite" sex, no natural divide to be spanned by surgery, by disguise, by passing' (212). Insofar as we are all cross-dressers, all transsexuals, 'there are no transsexuals'. Her critique is mounted against gender as a system, rather than gender as individual choice, problem or pleasure – that is why "we" are implicated in the cross-dressing. She acclaims the cultural move toward a post-transsexual era, with the increasing normalisation of

surgical transformations of the body instrumental to her optimism: 'the potential of medical technology to alter bodies makes natural gender and biological sex merely antiquated categories in the history of sexuality, that is, part of the inventedness of sex' (215). Referring to the increase in f2ms wanting operations, she understands surgery as simulating femininity and masculinity, rather than authorising it; as one of many options for gender fictioning. Though few f2ms want phalloplasty she argues that the construction of a *functional* penis would radically alter myths of gender that have policed subjectivity. 'If anyone could have one, who would want one?...Who might want a bigger one? Who might want an artificial one rather than the "natural" one they were born with?' (215).⁸

Halberstam builds her notion of gender as fiction through taking on the possibilities for diversity introducible by surgery as well as the multiple stagings of gender in cultural and subcultural production. Crucially, she pays attention to the constitutive role of reading in the creation of gender fictions. Reading, of course, does not make some gender fictions fictional against an imagined other "real" gender. Instead, for gender to be understood as fictional, and thus plastic, rewritable, and ungrounded, depends wholly on the reception of the specific gender fiction being performed. Crossing, or in Halberstam's term, "transitivity", can be understood to be happening when the reader acknowledges it as such. This acknowledgement is not simply intellectual, however. In the context of gender and sexuality, the acknowledgement of the crossing takes the form of fantasy and desire. The reader has not only to recognise the crossing but to recognise it as a representation of their own desire. This analysis complicates the transaction, in the context of cultural criticism, between the objects and subjects of those discourses. To read gender as performance, as Butler and her readers do (if in different ways), or as fiction as Halberstam does, requires the audience for those productions to address their own desires; to at the very least fictionalise their own genders. Reading, in this sense, is the very model of experience. As a state of responsive subjective interpretation – a movement between reader and fiction – experience was the element that went underground in those earlier debates around essentialism and constructionism. Its absence or misrecognition entrenched the sense of category intransigence that hamstrung the debates.

⁸ Halberstam's emphasis on functionality does not bother with the question of functional to and for whom and for what? The purportedly greater success in creating artificial vaginas for m2fs encodes the heterosexist assumptions governing medical discourse on the area. The m2f's vagina is deemed functional if it succeeds in avoiding collapse and is thus capable of being "receptive" in heterosexual intercourse. This notion of functionality is a long way from the notion that biological, and m2f, women might have: functions that include orgasm, menstruation reproductive capability.

Halberstam makes her case about the reader's constitutiveness in any transitivity through a reading of two films whose focal points are sex between an f2m and a bisexual woman, and an f2m and a lesbian woman. *Linda/Les and Annie* represents Annie Sprinkle and her f2m partner's new identity as a man. Les understands his new gender identity as a rectification rather than a transgression, a truth rather than a fiction. For Halberstam, it is Sprinkle's sexual response to Les that constitutes the successful crossing. Part of the film depicts sex between them. In conventional terms the sex does not proceed well as Les has technical problems with his new penis. Yet Sprinkle's evident bodily desire in relation to the f2m body itself constitutes a crossing.

Annie's desire, her ability to be a reader of gender, her titillation and pleasure, are all stimulated by the ambiguity of Les's body parts, by his hermaphroditic genitals, by his sewn and painted skin. Her fantasy, her sexuality, is a part of the enactment of "trans-sex" rather than its object or incidental partner. (Halberstam, 1994: 219 – 20)

In her reading of Les's gender fiction Sprinkle's own response implicates her in the fiction. She does not read, as a subject, the transitive object of Les's body; rather, she is intersubjectively incorporated into the fictions of gender at play in the dynamic.

By contrast, *Vera* dramatises the problem for gender transitivity when the reader "fails" the fiction. The film poses the question of dress and identity through the character Vera Bauer who changes her name to Bauer and dresses as and considers himself to be a man.

Bauer dresses up in a costume in order to hide some supposedly "true" identity, but in fact as the film progresses the costume becomes equivalent to self. The disguise, in other words, reveals the artificiality of the sexual dress code, and at the same time it seems to produce another sexuality, a set of desires previously inaccessible. (Halberstam, 1994: 221-22)

If there is a discernible gender genre of films, then their denouement is inevitably at the moment of sex. In *Vera* the film's issue comes alive when Bauer and his lesbian girlfriend are going to have sex. The girlfriend, Clara, removes her clothes and coaxes Bauer to do the same, considering it unfair if they are not both vulnerably naked. As Halberstam suggests, however, Bauer's vulnerability is precisely in his dress. His cross-dressing is his declaration of a sexual self and a relational desire. He undresses only to his undershirt and when Clara moves to touch his breasts he panics and runs. As Bauer's lesbian lover, Clara's self-identity requires that the sex she has is with a naked woman; she reads the clothed masculinity of Bauer as a signifier of a kind of real

lesbianism beneath the clothes. Bauer, by contrast is identified by his gender, complicating any lesbian sexuality between them. Bauer's sexuality is not readable solely in terms of its object, the lesbian woman Clara. 'The tragedy of this film lies not in Bauer's gender confusion however, but in her girlfriend's inability or unwillingness to read the code of Bauer's desire from her cross-dressed performance' (Halberstam, 1994: 222). The film had been reviewed in the lesbian press as an example of a dyke (Bauer) who "doesn't have a clue" about her lesbianism (223). In Halberstam's analysis, however, it is not her sexuality but her gender that creates a newer desire. The possibilities of that desire depend on it being intelligible. 'Bauer needs a reader, needs an other to reflect her masculinity back to her in the form of desire' (224). The central problem for the gender fictions represented in the two films is that they produce 'a script we often fail to follow' (224). For gender to be understood as fiction requires a readership prepared to render it so. As these examples plainly show, it is not certain that the stock (oppositional) scripts of gender can be rewritten at the scene of gender itself. How liberating or self-determined is Bauer's fictional masculinity if it requires, in the traditional manner, a woman to sexually verify it? What happens to Clara's gender fictions when they confront Bauer's? Why, if all genders are fictions, do some of the more transitive versions still rely on oppositionality for their meaning to be discerned? Halberstam is right to implicate the reader so fully in the process of transitivity. What her analysis cannot account for is a recurrent practice of misreading (the remarkable Annie Sprinkle notwithstanding) that reproduces the sex/gender system even when it is most foregrounded as a fiction.⁹

If critical analyses agree that boundaries between the real and the imitative are fluid, that "real" women (whose biological sex, social/psychic gender and sexuality are congruent) are not prior to lesbian femmes, m2fs *etc.*; that gender is a fiction without grounding (in the body, in pronouns) then what must critical discourses take account of to answer how some fictions have more material manifestation and positivity than others? In a legal context, for instance, a biologically congruent woman can marry a biologically congruent man, but an m2f and an f2m (to site an obviously "opposite" example) cannot. It may no longer be the practice to defend grounded categories against imitations in critical discourses, but it is crucial to explore what is still at force to enable some fictions to materialise instead of, and at the cost of, others. To begin to answer some of these questions I move this discussion to the scene of the sex/gender system's most public re-utterance, the heterosexual married couple. Here I offer an analysis of the complex gender and sexual, as well as economic, relations that converge

⁹ My reading of *Orlando* in Chapter 5 extends this discussion about reading and desire.

in that most scripted of scenes – the heterosexual marriage – when a man reveals he is a cross-dresser.

2.3 Wives on Transvestite Husbands

Wives are a subset of the discourse around cross-dressing married men because of their role as “readers” of their husband’s identities and desires. The pressure on women to accept their husband’s transvestism, which has often been deliberately kept from them until after they marry, is powerful in sexological discourses, as well as in the context of transvestite support groups. Annie Woodhouse (1989) discusses the pressure placed on wives to read their transvestite husbands in a prescribed way, suggesting that research interest in wives’ response to the transvestism is in terms of imposition on, rather than understanding of, the women. Most research concurs that wives of transvestite men are unhappy about and threatened by the practice, although the majority continue with the marriage. Bullough and Bullough cite an array of such surveys and research, including a survey of transvestite wives that determined that for most the “secret” had been kept from them until after the marriage; and though this disturbed them, they too wanted to keep the secret from the public and from their children (1983: 339-59).¹⁰ Economic considerations featured in the wives’ decisions to remain in their marriages. The majority of wives in the surveys and studies feel ongoing distress about their husbands’ transvestism, yet their distress is the most difficult response for researchers to account for. Psychiatrists refer to the wives who stress over their husband’s transvestism as “moral masochists” who ‘seek psychic suffering by claiming moral superiority’ (Woodhouse, 1989: 345). Bullough and Bullough describe contemptuously as “doormats” the wives who carry on the household duties and buy “feminine clothing” for their husbands. They reserve no insult on the other hand for the way ‘the husband accepts the part of the female role that focuses on leisure-time activities rather than on the drudgery of the role’ (Bullough & Bullough, 1993: 344). Pressure for wives to read the right way is less surprisingly but no less oppressively exerted by the transvestite men themselves in, for example, Bullough and Bullough’s account of a support group for wives set up by a TV/TS group. The women joined the group to give and receive support amongst themselves. Many had considered divorcing their husbands but were working toward finding ways of coping with the marriage. ‘A board member of the male transvestite club felt that he should be able to attend meetings and help set the goals of the group, with a primary focus being to help wives to support their husbands’ (Woodhouse, 1989: 343).

¹⁰ This particular survey was conducted by Richard Docter, whose name begs the question of his corrective intentions toward transvestite men.

The most charged question for the wives of transvestite men is the foundational and categorical question of what makes a woman. No longer self-evidently defined within the marriage contract, the frequent lack of correspondence between the wives' gender self-definitions and the gendered self-avowal of their cross-dressed husbands is negotiated across the terrain of experience. What might contribute to the distress of the women in the studies is a recognition that their husbands get to be "leisure-time" women, whilst they remain "wives". Encountering the fluidity of gender identities for perhaps the first time, through their husbands, these women are confronted with a question mark over the role they have accepted by dint of its apparent naturalness, its correspondence to their "biology". Seeing gender denaturalised through the cross-dressing of their husbands registers the cultural deceptions that link women to their biology. How can they explain, if not by the logic of essentialism, the subordination of the role of woman, and their seemingly irreversible economic inequities that their husbands-as-women escape? Economic dependence and drudgery here define for them what makes a woman, privilege the axis along which men and women are differentiated culturally. Bullough and Bullough's text bristles with examples of how, in the course of defending a certain scope for gender fluidity, they and the psychologists and psychiatrists they cite, speak from within egregiously unchallenged gender stereotypes.¹¹ Woodhouse's research reveals a resentment held by many wives 'that the adoption of femininity by their men has very little to do with their own experience...For them it is a kind of candy-floss-and-tinsel femininity which takes little or no account of the reality of women's lives as workers, wives and mothers' (Woodhouse, 1989: 128). One researcher's findings included the transvestite men known as "princesses", described as among the most difficult of the husbands. 'When these men cross-dressed they spent their time gazing at themselves in the mirror. Their definition of themselves as women did not include their participation in cooking, housekeeping, shopping, or taking care of children' (1989: 343).

In a reversal that parallels the fictions of gender under discussion, the "princesses" have a prince to rescue their reputation. Virginia Prince, a self-appointed exemplar of the good transvestite wife wrote in 1967 the classic book for wives, *The Transvestite and His Wife*, in which she 'reassured the reader that her husband was not homosexual (and that he was a much nicer person than homosexual men are)' (cited in Woodhouse, 1989: 347). The book's emphasis is on how a wife is to cope with her husband's

¹¹ The text exerts rhetorical effort extolling gender fluidity, but remains oblivious to its own participation in the reification of gender roles. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the "drug of choice" for controlling an obsessive-compulsive expression of cross-dressing, implying allegiance to biological origins of behaviour that weakens its arguments for a greater acceptance of diverse expressions of difference.

transvestism. An ambiguously humoured grading system for wives, devised by transvestite men and endorsed by Prince through its representation in her text, rates as A+ the wife who 'goes into ecstasy every time her husband cross-dresses. She never buys herself anything unless she buys something equally pretty for her husband's femme self' (347); falling to a below average D to mark 'overt hostility about cross-dressing. When she finds him dressed, she suggests he do the housework' (347), plunging to an unequivocal F: 'This wife divorces the transvestite husband and takes the children with her. She tells the world about his cross-dressing and gets full custody of the children' (348). In a context other than that of the "transvestite wife", a shift in a wife's behaviour in an unsatisfying marriage, from economic selflessness (the A+ category), to suggesting the husband contribute to the housework (D), to divorce and full custody, would in part map a chronology of gains for women effected through feminism.

It is more than the datedness of the text – written before the wide circulation of feminist and liberationist discourses provided other vocabularies of gender – that renders it so jarringly anti-feminist. Its well-intentioned embrace of the right to support of a transvestite "husband" emerges from a speaking position that gloats at its successful defeat of phobia over and against women who struggle with the news of their husband's transvestism. It denies the positionality of "wives" and reasserts a unitary position of duty first and foremost to the husband. Twenty-five years later, in Bullough and Bullough, that position is still fixed. From Prince's perspective, transvestism enables men 'to obtain relief from social expectations' (Woodhouse, 1989: 347). This is enabled in part through the support of wives who are in the process impelled to adapt to the pressure of further social expectations (to be the perfect transvestite wife). It seems that when gender becomes fluid, it does so for some positions more readily than for others. In the context framed by Prince and well circulated thereafter, the fluidity of the husband's gender is in inverse proportion to the wife's, who bears the brunt through a less negotiated and more entrenched role of "wife". Fluidity itself is debatable in some contexts of transvestism. Where, for example, a transvestite man separates his identity as a man from his identity as a woman and says, when "dressed", to his wife 'When John comes back could you tell him that the washing machine needs fixing' (129), do we read fluidity into the way a man can take on and take off roles with choice? Or is this scenario an effect not of fluidity but of an introjected differentiation of gender roles? These questions are relevant when "wives" are pilloried by sex experts for not adapting to gender fluidity in their husbands.

The cross-dressed men in the context of marriage complicate the notion of what makes a woman. For the transvestite men, it has to do with clothes and how they see themselves (looking like women) – an aesthetic and psychically informed notion. For the wives it has to do in part with the economics and practicalities of running a household – a socially, materially informed notion. An additional and less explored but distinct issue for the wives was the fear of the kind of “woman” it made them, to have transvestite husbands. ‘A cross-dressing mate raised the specter of lesbianism, and many were distressed by these feelings’ (Woodhouse, 1989: 342). Deborah Feinbloom’s research included interviewing the wives of transvestite men in her ‘anthropological study of the men involved in a transvestite sorority’ (343). In her interpretation of the wives’ responses, the women she interviewed had low self-esteem.

Once married, the low-self esteem of these wives made them feel that marriage to a transvestite was better than no marriage at all. They were also vulnerable to competition from their husbands in the area of clothing and appearance. They continually told their husbands that they made the most attractive women...some of the transvestite wives and girlfriends who shopped and participated fully in the cross-dressing activities were looking for a girlfriend rather than a lover or they were latent homosexuals. (Woodhouse, 1989: 343)

The many unaddressed assumptions here make this comment difficult to unpack. The distinction between “latent homosexuals” and women who want a “girlfriend” to shop with is not clear and imposes a difference that may be of degree rather than kind. Are these homoerotic women who shop the same as those who are “vulnerable to competition” with the “most attractive women”, their husbands? Are they the same as those whose low self-esteem leads them to opt for marriage, however unsatisfying, rather than divorce? It is revealing that a survey of transvestite men and their wives turns them both, potentially, into lesbians. The “potential” is important in this context. What would actually make these people lesbian? How they are read, how they define themselves, a congruence of both their readings of themselves and the way they are read? Read by whom: each other, the “public”, their children? Somewhere in amongst all the feelings, desires, confusions and ambiguities there is the question of agency that might here be defined as consensus and choice. Could there be a consensus of reading positions where, for instance, each partner knows more or less how the other identifies when they shop for women’s clothes; whether they shop as lesbians, a straight couple, friends? What would be required for each partner to negotiate a reading of themselves in the relationship without those positions being mutually exclusive? Certainly the institution of marriage is what allowed the couple to come together initially in a purportedly consensual reading that represented the gender of each in clearly readable

terms. The transvestite man entered the institution of marriage, in part, to find a woman prepared to accede to the fiction of dutiful "wife"; the woman entered the same context, in part, to find a good provider, and thus, a "man". When the particular gender fiction authored by marriage strays from the script the consensual reading practices of the husband and wife, in relation to each other, lose their mutual reinforcing ability.

The chaotic feelings that the transvestite man's wife experiences when confronted with the "specter" of lesbian, or other issues around the transvestite activity, break up her self-concept but also bring to the surface other options for self-identity. This does not imply that one simply chooses alternative desires when a situation or context calls for it. Rather, it recognises that in the fluidity of identity categories there is also a flow of corporeal possibilities whose motion interrelates to psychic and conceptual changes. The idea that one's sexual desire (and the objects of one's desire) are fixed is no more tenable than, indeed is consonant with, the notion of natural congruence between sex, gender and sexuality. If the gender identity of a transvestite man's wife is altered in some way by her husband's transvestism then what happens to her sense of her gender and sexuality? Bullough and Bullough refer to cross-dressing as the "chief erotic pleasure" of transvestite men, and many wives comment on their dislike of sex when their husbands are cross-dressed. In the marriage context "wives" are expected to adapt quickly when this secret is revealed. So if the wives' sexual practices and self-identifications are altered through the relation to the transvestism of their husbands, why do they so recalcitrantly seek recourse to the "realness" of their gender, in contrast to the candy-floss-and-tinsel femininity of their husbands? The absence of research about "husbands" whose wives' "chief erotic pleasure" is lesbian sex (or autoeroticism, or celibacy, etc.) and of books pressuring husbands to be supportive of such preferences, reminds that the discussion above has never really been about (never *just* about) the transvestite man, gender fluidity and social acceptance. These discussions are about renegotiating rights in relationships whose power dynamic is weighted culturally, if not always individually, heavily in favour of the masculine position, whoever occupies that position.

Taking at face value the distress felt by wives of transvestite men, and by the men themselves, opens up an understanding of the slippages of identity that occur in the relation between a congruent woman and a transvestite man. It also raises questions about the different economic, emotional and other needs that are met or expected to be met by marriage for women, men, transvestite men, and wives of transvestite men. The scripted certainty of the marriage institution in practice precludes the grounds for a negotiated reading of genders between people either within that institution or, it seems,

who wish to set themselves apart from it. In the sexologists' research, the women are still defined relationally to their husbands in the marriage context, qualified by their relationships: no wonder the "specter" of lesbianism creeps in. If their self-understanding as women is related to their sexual partner's gender and sexual congruence, ratified by marriage, then what does it mean for these women to desire a partner whose clothes and self-identities construct them as a woman? The men too have inevitably confronted the fear of how they will be read, in the first instance by keeping their transvestism a secret from their wives in order for the marriage to go ahead (Woodhouse, 1989: 343). The presence of a wife confers on the transvestite man his oppositional masculinity in the public sense, without prohibiting his other gender fictions. 'Transvestites often hope that marriage will put an end to their desire to cross-dress' (129). The palpable failure of the institution of marriage to guarantee absolute psychic reproduction of the sex/gender system informs the distress of both partners in a transvestite marriage. The men who marry to end their transvestite activity find it fails them; the women who want to marry (men) are concerned that the public declarations of the marriage service might be seen through by others as inconsistent with the marriage reality (120-33).

The question raised by the wives about the disjunction between what they perceive as their own experiences as women and the fantasy of "woman" enacted by their husbands problematises experience in relation to fictions of gender. Experience in that context is not used in the same ways it is in Fuss's classroom scene, where hierarchies of oppression are self-consciously played out in bids to take centre stage in the classroom politics. The wives of the various studies access experience as the only way to describe and understand the distresses they feel in relation to their husband's fictions of women. Most of the literature criticises them, and "mothers", for failing their men, and extols them to educate themselves and come to terms with the choices of their husband. The anger, frustration and confusion is felt as an individual experience rather than a philosophical question, and most of them want the conventional marriage they thought they were getting into (125-33).

Recognition of the wives' emphasis on their experience of being women need not, as Woodhouse describes it, lead us back to 'relativism and atomised individualism whereby each person ideally makes their own choices in accordance with their own tastes' (144). Woodhouse's analysis generates an opposition between fantasy (the transvestite's gender/s) and experience (the wives' gender). Though she does not work thoroughly through the lack of grounding to any gender position, this absence is in part strategic to her argument, in part informed by taking interest in the conventionally

disregarded wives of transvestite men. The need for these women to return to their experiences for understanding does not place them in a debased category. Rather, it suggests a forgotten space or state where subjective agency functions: a state of being where we constantly renegotiate who we think and feel we are. We might consider that space between systems of meaning (the Symbolic, the social) and fantasy to be the energetic realm of the subject, where associations are made, interpreted, chosen, discarded. Without addressing this position, we cannot account for the way that the fictions of gender – in this case transvestite women and congruent women – misread each other with destructive results. The difficulty in working with this concept of experience is that this state of knowing ends where representation and analysis begins.

Despite the constant strain on the marriages reported in each of the cited surveys, the marriages often continue. The context of these relationships provides a working example of how marriage continues to confer sex, gender and sexuality congruence within the public domain, even if its reach falls short of the psychic realities of those enscripted by it. Earlier I questioned what enabled some gender fictions to impact more materially than others. The practice and institution of marriage is one such site for the privileging and guarantee of the fiction of the binary sex/gender system, over all other gender fictions. It is difficult to imagine a cultural place that falls outside the long shadow cast by the institution of marriage where gender fictions could be fairly and consensually negotiated. Such a place, after all, would have no use of gender fictions. The persistence with which terms are grounded (in biology, or whatever) compels acknowledgement that the changing fashions of criticism are not always articulated to changes in the political questions that drive them.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has drawn from the categorical crises dramatised by the staged entry of "men" into "feminism" as a means to analyse institutional and intellectual readings of cross-dressing across its semantic, sexological, experiential and political forms. The critical point has been the difficulty, but also the imperative, of accounting for the role of reading practices in the production of meaning, politics and change. Experience has surfaced as the repressed term in debates around gendered and sexual identity. The difficulty of accounting for experience in theorisations of subjectivity cannot be sufficient reason for debasing its force. Its theoretical immateriality lends weight to the possibility that experience might be the single most threatening function in the engendering of the subject.

The next chapter considers in more detail the relation of institutions to the conferral of identities, and the role of reading in supporting those systems. If cross-dressing was taken by Showalter to represent a ruse for men to territorialise feminism; and if transvestism is taken in part by the wives of transvestite men as a debasing of their own lived experience as women; then what territorial and experiential conflicts arise when not only the clothing but also the biological system is crossed? Transgenderism is inherently dependent on the act of "reading", in a negative sense. Reading, for transgenderists, signifies the failure to pass. Successful passing is constituted by the ability to avoid being "read". Reading, in an everyday sense, can engender subjects. For transgenderists, the practice of engendering a congruent self – a self whose gender and sex are continuous with the sex/gender system – relies on avoiding the naturalising engenderment of reading.

2 NO BODY'S LISTENING: TRANSGENDERISM AND THE CULTURAL REGULATION OF STANDING

The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity.
(Woolf, 1928: 133)

The term "transgenderism" designates the range of behaviours and desires which are not predicated on a one-to-one correspondence between sexed and gendered identities. The mere existence of transgenderists has been sufficient for some enthusiastic cultural reviewers to herald the undoing of the rigidly dualistic sex/gender system.¹ Here I closely examine representations of transgenderism in popular cultural and legal contexts to argue, on the contrary, that mere representation is not a sufficient means to multiply subject positions beyond the oppositional two inscribed by the sex/gender system. The three-part argument in this chapter begins with receptions of transgenderism in two pop-cultural films, *The Crying Game* and *Paris is Burning*. Each film represented transgenderists to enormous audiences, to prodigious critical acclaim and with box office success; yet this palpable visibility managed to render *unintelligible* in both films the subject positions of the transgenderists. To address this unintelligibility I locate the films within the contexts of their reception, paying particular attention to the interface of *Paris is Burning* with the Law.

The influence exerted by the Law upon the discursive domain of popular culture forms the basis of the second part of the chapter. If subjective practices are to challenge the sex/gender system beyond the domain of the cultural, they must negotiate successfully the broader public sphere and its interface with the private sphere. To this end I examine judicial reading practices informing decisions in cases involving transsexual identity. Analysis of these legal discourses – and medical support for them – extends to

¹ Garber (1992) is only one of the more discussed of many such claims.

the defining structure of judicial discourse, the place of standing in the constitution of the subject.

In the third part of the chapter I consider Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick's response to Butler's *Gender Trouble*, in which she theorises performativity within the linguistic sphere. Sedgwick's argument is a study in the application of performativity to queer self-avowal. It merits consideration in this argument for its responsiveness to the empowering force of the institutions of Law and marriage in the conferral of subjectivity. Butler's response to Sedgwick offers judicial citation as a site for analysis both of the source of authority and its demystification, though the encircling powers of the symbolic ensure that demystification remains provisional. I complete this argument with analysis of what citation, and performativity generally, fails to address in its efforts to subvert the sex/gender system through self-avowed subjectivity.

1 TRANSGENDERISM ON FILM

The subject for my analysis in *The Crying Game* and *Paris is Burning* is an m2f transgenderist. In *The Crying Game* the transgenderist is figured in relation to a masculine subject position, which is the focus of the film's narrative. The narrative function of the transgenderist is to acquire her subject position from, and in the place of, the congruent ("real") woman. This shift is essential to resolve the narrative tension of the threat the transgenderist otherwise poses to the sex/gender system represented through the film's characterisations. In *Paris is Burning* the self-avowed subjectivities of the ballroom queens fail to signify beyond the context in which the rules of "reading" are mutually understood and regulated. For the m2f transgenderist this had a fatal effect. For most of the other ball queens the effect was the relinquishment of economic and cultural capital in the face of legal misrecognition of their self-avowed subjectivities.

1.1 *The Crying Game*

What generated the excited critical reception of Neil Jordan's film *The Crying Game* is emblematised in this retrospectively revealing imperative from one reviewer: 'see it'.² Coded in these words is the narrative twist whose "surprise" effect was faithfully kept secret by the reviewers, and most viewers, of the film. 'Seeing it' is what this film is about. The pronoun refers, as often it does in colloquial innuendo, to a penis;

² Simpson (1994) recounts this and other responses in what he describes as the American critics' "love-fest" provoked by the film. Simpson's critical project shares my interest in critiquing the cultural fixity of gendered subjects. His text's title, *Male Impersonators*, foregrounds Butler's notion of the performativity of gender, in its treatment of men as impersonators of masculinity.

specifically to the penis revealed when the transgendered character removes her clothes for the male lead. As the (main) penis in this film operates in synecdochal relation to the phallus, I explore its narrative function in relation to the fictions of psychoanalysis that it invokes. My reading of the film, which tells the story of an IRA soldier's unwitting romance with a transgenderist, is contrary to the general reception of the film as progressive concerning sexual politics. I use the oedipal narrative, with some irony, as an analytical key to this film. I do this because the film's overdrawn metaphors of genital significance and castration make it read like a deliberate application of the oedipal narrative to the modern representational problem of transgenderism. Rather than read it against the grain, I read it alongside its own terms, writ large. Far from a sympathetic representation of a transgendered subject, I propose that the film's principal narrative device reinstalls disciplinary borders which reign in any potential proliferation of subject positions in order to reproduce the sex/gender system.

An overview of characterisation in the film shows how the complex interarticulations of gender, sexuality, race, class and political affiliations in subjectivities, are overwritten by a decontextualising romance of masculine subjectivity. This overwriting is achieved by the tendentiously confused terms of conventional and marginal subject positions which compete in each character; presumably to cancel each other out. Each character is a cocktail of either man/woman, white/black, English/Irish, straight/queer. Jude is white and straight, but Irish, and a woman. Jody is a man and English, but also black and, it becomes belatedly apparent, bisexual (flagged in his gender-ambiguous name). Fergus is a man, and white, but Irish, and, later, polymorphously perverse. Dil is English, but black and a woman, though later "really" male and therefore polymorphously perverse. Dil's subject position as "really" male is the point of contention that the film's narrative negotiates and resolves. It does this by removing the one oppositional term – Jude as woman – which hampers Dil's accession to the dominant subject position in this film, *unthreateningly* phallic woman. The significance for my argument of this class, gender, racial, and sexual melting pot is which subject positions emerge intelligibly, and at what cost.³

³ Simpson refutes Wheelwright's suggestion that the film 'brilliantly fuses anxieties about sexual identity with questions of nationalism', arguing instead that it is a 'thoroughly *American* film which women, gays, blacks and transsexuals should be deeply distrustful of. But most especially women' (1994: 155-56). His argument locates the film within a 1980s and 1990s tradition of Hollywood "Good Girl/Bad Girl" narratives exemplified by *Fatal Attraction*, *The Hand That Rocks The Cradle* and *Single White Female*. These films inflect cultural anxieties about independent women, and are stylistically and ideologically traceable to the film noir genre whose narratives notoriously resolve by containing the horror of unleashed "feminine" desire. Reading *The Crying Game* as a fetishistic narrative which negotiates its anxieties of sexual un/differentiation through Dil's body and Jude's killing, renders it intelligible within those cultural anxieties.

I focus here on key moments in which the lines of gender and sexuality are drawn between the characters. Jude is introduced at the beginning of the film as the *femme fatale* whose sexuality is deployed to lure Jody to his IRA kidnappers. Jody's impotence in the face of Jude's sexuality is signalled in his hands being tied and his face hooded, aligning blindness to castration in an obvious parallel with the classic oedipal story. When Jody turns out to be an inconsequential bargaining chip to his English employers and sentenced to be shot, his relationship with Fergus develops. There are several moments establishing tenderness between them. Fergus removes Jody's hood, and is rebuked by Jude for this. Jude makes her point by pistol-whipping Jody across his face, in a telling display of the phallic contest between her – wanting Jody “blinded” – and Fergus – wanting him to see. There is also the moment of sexual coyness between them when, with an overdrawn display of discomfort, Fergus holds Jody's penis so he can have a piss while his hands are tied. Jody shows his picture of Dil to Fergus, who admires her and promises to play Jody's role – to buy Dil a drink – after Jody's death. Fergus allows Jody to escape, but an English armoured personnel carrier kills him anyway. With Jody out of the way the real and displaced romance between them can unfold. Fergus goes to London and begins a relationship with Dil, whose submissive girliness signals her oppositeness to the phallic Jude. The two women are figured as apparitional others to the masculine identity in formation in the film. Jude represents the fear of castration, and Dil the rejection of that fear. In Simpson's description they are ‘monsters of virtue and bitchery evading fully-fledged womanhood’ (1994: 167).

The unfolding narrative forces a renegotiation of those relational identities through its romance of masculine subjectivity. This occurs in the vaunted unveiling scene where Dil reveals her body – her secret – to Fergus. Fergus's homosocial identification with Jody, and his consequent cross-identification with Dil, are instantaneously redrawn at the moment of Dil's unveiled penis/phallus. It is a fantasy moment where identification and desire can unite without the threat of castration or homosexuality. That is, where masculine desire (Fergus) for, and identification with the phallus (figured literally), is sanctioned by the collocation of the penis and femininity. But this unity fails to signify beyond the moment because it destabilises the (masculine/feminine) subject positions which are oppositionally wrought within the symbolic economy of the film. At this moment Fergus's homosocial identification with Jody, hitherto safely mediated by Dil as the woman, collapses into a three-way homosexual identification because Dil is male. And the masculine subject position

taken up by Fergus in the narrative is threatened because Dil is nevertheless also a woman, with a penis.⁴

Because Fergus has psychically "decided" in favour of heterosexuality, it is not his bodily desire (for Dil, as a woman) but his gender identity that is repulsed by the "revelation" of Dil's masculinity (synecdochally read off her genitals, notwithstanding her self-identity as a woman). According to the either/or logic internalised by the subject in moving from the undifferentiated childhood identifications of polymorphous perversity to the heterosexual matrix of identity, revulsion is the opposite of desire. Identity in the symbolic is a question of one's relational subject position to the "other". Thus in the oppositional logic of sexual difference Fergus becomes abject in the face of his now undifferentiated speaking position. This abjection is literally figured in his response: he cannot speak, instead he races to the bathroom and vomits.

As the subject of the film, Fergus can only resolve his abjection in the face of Dil (a woman)'s penis by constructing a newly oppositional relation to Dil which necessitates the exclusion of Jude. Through such strategies the film is not renegotiating the either/or logic of the sex/gender system but is trying to rework its fantasies *within* that logic. With Jude present in the narrative Dil can never measure up to the status of real woman. If Dil is not a woman then Fergus's subject position is unintelligible or, at best, unacceptable, within the terms of the symbolic which produces it. As the film's *raison d'être* is to dramatise the triumph of a masculine subjectivity which wants to practice a polymorphous perversity but not to *be* polymorphously perverse, it has to calculate the means by which a relationship between Fergus and Dil can signify within the symbolic. This is achievable only without the presence of the painful refutation of Dil's claims to womanhood which Jude embodies.

For Fergus desire and identification, prohibited between him and Jody in the representational scheme of the film, can happily reunite in his desire for Dil because his identification with her will not be at the cost of his own castration: he can identify with a woman like Dil because she *has* a phallus. And in terms of the phantasmatic identification described through the narrative it is of course a phallus, rather than a penis, which constitutes Dil's secret. In psychoanalytic terms, identification and desire must be understood as separate for a man to desire a woman, to ensure that his penis

⁴ Because the film's narrative overtly operates a phallic economy, Dil's "lack" of breasts, which is revealed before her "lack" of female genitals is revealed, does not of itself signify her maleness. Positive possession of a penis, and the significations this generates, is the real subject of the film.

makes it with him over the divide to her.⁵ At the same time, and in keeping with Freud's "disavowal" as a simultaneous holding of conflicting beliefs, its significance – as phallus – inheres only in his sense that she lacks it. It functions as a fetish, synecdochally standing in for his difference from her, which he needs to maintain, even as he identifies with her. The conflicting masculine need for, and anxiety about, sexual difference recalls the trauma of undifferentiated identification with the maternal body: an identificatory pleasure achieved at the cost of independent subjectivity. So in the film's version of oedipalisation, for Fergus to identify with and to desire a woman, he must keep his phallic secret from her.

Dil is a safe woman because the identification doesn't necessitate the veiling of the penis. They can both have one. Jude remains the castrating threat in the narrative. Jody fell victim to Jude's castrating female sexuality when she indirectly lured him to his death. She presents a literal and figurative castrating threat to Fergus, threatening him with death, her hand on his crotch, unless he carries out an IRA assassination. Dil, the idealised woman, recognises the terms of the game. If the identification between Dil and Fergus is complete, then Jude's threat carries over to Dil. In this economy of the phallus, where lack equates to symbolic death, one of the women must relinquish their hold on the phallus. So Dil blows Jude away. To drive home the point Jude is shown bleeding from the mouth: a visual metaphor of menstruation representing death metonymically. Reproductively voided, it is Jude who ends up castrated; her impotence equating to death. Dil's penis, here figuratively detumesced by its proximity to (through her masquerade of) femininity, has been displaced onto the phallic symbolism of the gun. The real quest for the phallus, it seems, bears little relation to genitality. It is a quest for the *cultural significance* of masculine subjectivity – that irresolute confusion of phalli and supplementarity in an economy of sexual reproduction – the symbolic priority of becoming-man over becoming-woman.

⁵ In Butler's discussion of Lacan's symbolic, in which the Name of the Father designates 'the father's law as it determines appropriate kinship relations which include appropriate and mutually exclusive lines of identification and desire' (1993a: 100), her elaboration of the permutations of identification and desire illustrates the psychic implausibility of their oppositional status:

If we grant the psychoanalytic presumption that primary prohibitions not only produce deflections of sexual desire but consolidate a psychic sense of "sex" and sexual difference, then it appears to follow that the coherently heterosexualized deflections require that identifications be deflected across the sexual divide to members of the opposite sex. But if a man can identify with his mother, and produce desire from that identification ... he has already confounded the psychic description of stable gender development. And if that same man desires another man, or a woman, is his desire homosexual, heterosexual, or even lesbian? And what is to restrict any given individual to a single identification? (99)

Just when the representation of transgenderists might plausibly be about the visibility of transgenderists, it appears instead as a representation of the incorrigible oedipal drama of masculine subjectivity. That is why class and race affiliations are unrealised in the film. In this oedipal drama, class and race function as tropes of "femininity", not as material or contextual positionalities. In this heterocentric film the fantasy and fear of a "real" woman is subdued by the reassuring fantasy of a phallic woman so that masculine (phallic) identification and desire can co-exist within a heterosexual frame. It does not matter that Fergus and Dil do not continue a sexual relationship, although the possibility is left open beyond the film's end. The point is that the identification and desire between them is framed by the oppositionality of subject positions. This is what gets recuperated when Jude is killed off. In the final scene Dil visits Fergus in jail. The glass panel between them, although a spatial barrier, is a culturally regulated and thus safe mirror drawing attention to the operations of identification which continue between them. This above all is the romance of the film's narrative, the romance of same-sex identification, in its double safety: represented as oppositional (Dil a woman, Fergus a man, Jude dead) and policed (suspended by the jail sentence, and by the glass panel). It promises the audience indulgence in an apparently non-oppositional (same-sex) desire without the cost of our oppositionally wrought subject positions.

Rather than challenge the demands of compulsory heterosexuality, this film conflates masculine desire and self-identification with sleight-of-hand. This is represented synecdochally as the phallus (part) being taken for the masculine self (whole). The narrative can only imagine same-sex desire in the presence of a (surrogate) woman. The role of the "real" woman is disavowed in favour of the concept of "woman", and the heterosexualising apparatus remains undisturbed by the fantasy of same-sex desire. This representation of transgenderism reworks the oppositional sex/gender matrix at the cost of doing violence to the feminine term. Consequently it does violence to the identity of the m2f transgenderist who is defined negatively, constituted by repudiation of the feminine.

The regulatory fiction of psychoanalysis plays a role in this bind of transgendered unintelligibility that is similar in structure to the related system of kinship, the judiciary. Both discursive systems share the constraining function of circularity in their authoritative gesture toward reading practices. To develop this argument I move from the fiction of *The Crying Game* to the "reality" fiction of Jennie Livingston's documentary *Paris is Burning*, where questions of legal interpretation more palpably intervene in the representational possibilities of relational subject positions.

1.2 *Paris is Burning*

Judith Butler refers to the legal constitution of subjects for her argument about drag in *Paris is Burning*. She deploys Althusser's notion of interpellation, in which 'it is the police who initiate the call or address by which a subject becomes socially constituted' (1993a: 121). This is, importantly, a *unilateral* act enacting 'the power and force of the law to compel fear at the same time that it offers recognition at an expense' (121). In this formulation the avowal of a subject position, with corresponding recognition, is compelled by fear. This process is mirrored psychically in the adoption of a gender and sex under the threat of punishment for failing to do so. This threat is the foundational authorisation of the regularised chain of citation of norms, the iteration of which, in Butler's notion of performativity, constitutes the condition of the subject (95).⁶ The performance of a sexed subjectivity is 'a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not...determining it fully in advance' (95). Lacan's work on the symbolic has articulated the regulating role it plays in the construction of sexed subjects which is why Butler turns to it for her elaboration of the performativity of gender. Castration is the threatened punishment, introjected psychically, which accompanies the symbolic compulsion to take up a "sex" (96). The abject effects of castration include, at least, the figures of the feminised fag and the phallicised dyke. For Lacan the abjectness – the inarticulacy – of these figures compels the assumption of a sexed position within language; a subject position which will not recognise homosexual subjectivity. The psychic registration of this imperative prevents the assumption of sex from being volitional. This is how Butler formulates the point:

If to assume a sexed position is to identify with a position marked out within the symbolic domain, and if to identify involves fantasizing the possibility of approximating that symbolic site, then the heterosexist constraint that compels the assumption of sex operates through the regulation of phantasmatic identification. (97)

This construction of subjects problematises resistance. If cultural norms are to alter, how and where do newer positions enter into circulation, as surely they do? Butler offers this response: if the interpellation of the law is approximate and never complete there is room for refusing it 'in the form of the parodic inhabiting of conformity that

⁶ Her chapter 'Phantasmatic Identification and the Assumption of Sex' maps this argument about the subject's assumption of a sexuality on the basis of a fear, and about gender performativity being linked to the psychic registering of political constraints. (1993a)

subtly calls into question the legitimacy of the command, a repetition of the law into hyperbole, a rearticulation of the law against the authority of the one who delivers it' (122). Insofar as the interpellation's productions are in excess of its regulatory ambit – insofar as the law's address in producing a lawful subject produces 'a set of consequences that exceed and confound what appears to be the disciplining intention motivating the law' (122) – the interpellation is not always performative. What this says more generally about performatives is that they generate meanings in excess of those which they name, 'signifying in excess of any intended referent' (122). This is really only a reminder of what we know about slippage in language, and implicitly, of the importance of reception to a text's effected meanings. Here I contend that the law's interpellation of a subject is untroubled about its partiality. Its motivations in hailing a subject are frequently at variance with the subject's own motivations to operate within the symbolic. The law needs only that part of the subject (the referent) that conforms, and more often fails to conform, to its regulatory imperatives, in the specific instances of its hailing the subject. The law has no need for a subject fully present to its symbolic interpellation, and in one-to-one correspondence with its psychic introjections. It more than suffices for the purposes of the law to read the subject synecdochally, taking the part it names for the whole referent so named. And if those significations that are in excess of the legal performative double back in parody of the law, the law itself does not shift to accommodate this parody, it takes its synecdochal reading practices to each new situation.

When Butler concludes that this failure of the performative 'provides the linguistic occasion and index for a consequential disobedience' (122) the assertion is undermined by its paralleling of the symbolic Law of the Father with the regulating law of the land. They are indeed mutually constitutive in their proscriptions of the subject, but their regulating effects on subjects are not always the same. A symbolic refusal of the law of subjectivity, in the form of hyperbolic repetition, will not always equate with the same form of refusal in a courtroom context. That is to say, performative failure is not always already so: it might effect "disobedience" in a linguistic context where it can readily be angled as a trope. But the contexts, and the interpretations within those contexts, are at least as constitutive as the performative, of the subjects effected by it. The police who hail the subject in Butler's example are no doubt indifferent to any parodic conformity, hyperbolic repetition or linguistic excess, in relation to the subject of their address. More importantly, the Law that the police recite is indifferent to those intended subversions, and inevitably retaliates for "contempt" of its laws. The subject produced in the symbolic by psychic introjection of the threat of punishment is not the same subject constructed on demand by the law. They both inhabit language, and are

oppositionally constructed to be sure; but the constitutive differences inhere in the differing practices which *read* the subject, and so it is to these practices that a transformative politics must turn in order to effect the rethinking of heterocentricity which Butler attributes (admittedly with qualifications) to the self-avowing subject.⁷ I extend this argument through analysis of Butler's reception of the drag subjects in *Paris is Burning*. I focus on the application of "performativity" to the gender roles which, in her account, produce the effects of "disobedience" discussed above.

Following her logic of hyperbolic reiteration, Butler understands drag to be subversive 'to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality' (125) and, then only in some circumstances, for, 'it is clear that there are domains in which heterosexuality can concede its lack of originality and naturalness but still hold on to its power' (126). She exemplifies the point by reference to some of the mainstream drag films generated by Hollywood which produce and regulate homosexual panic and suspicion. But to open her account of drag's sometime subversiveness Butler overreacts to feminist critiques that regard m2f drag as misogynist, and the question of gender becomes the vanishing point which provides her argument's perspective. She misconstrues the charge of misogyny, by bell hooks, Marilyn Frye and Janice Raymond, as a false presumption that drag is an articulation of homosexuality. She says 'the problem with the analysis of drag as only misogyny is, of course, that it figures male-to-female transsexuality, cross-dressing, and drag as male homosexual activities – which they are not always – and it further diagnoses male homosexuality as rooted in misogyny' (127). Yet only Butler makes the linkage of misogyny with homosexual men, not hooks *et al.* Even if they were construing drag narrowly as a practice exclusively of male homosexuality, the misogyny is located in the gender ("male") play and not the sexuality ("homosexual") inferred. Misogyny is implicated just as much in heterosexual drag. Those m2f drag films that Butler regarded as recuperative – *Tootsie*, *Some Like It Hot* – represent as grotesque the adoption by "real" men of the trumperies by which "real" women are constituted. The implausibility of gender crossing is the source of these films' humour. And that implausibility is represented by appeals to a masculine identity which recoils in horror at identification with the feminine. The reality of masculinity – of which such films

⁷ The interpretive misadventures of gender performativity in her prequel to *Bodies*, *Gender Trouble* (see Chapter 1), demonstrate amply the constitutive role of reading for rendering subjects intelligible. Butler connects the confusion over "performative" to the political importance for the queer movement of public acting out and theatricalisation of queer agency in, for example, die-ins. Despite this explanation, the misreading seems more aligned to a nostalgia for fixed identity in almost any politicised intervention – where declaration of an identity has become a social imperative for achieving standing – and the difficulty of projecting a politics of subjectivity that does not posit a literal subject.

want to reassure their masculine audiences – is thrown into relief by the absurdity and failure of men who try to be other than masculine. Butler's reflexive aim to disarticulate an imposed link between misogyny and male homosexuality is a readable reaction against the homophobic preposterousness of applying cause and effect to the assumption of homosexual desire (whereby lesbian desire is the effect of misandry, and the reverse for gay men). To rightly refute this presumption need not entail the dismissal of any critique of m2f drag as having misogynist effect. Like homophobia, misogyny after all is not only the condition of an individual consciousness; it is relational to the performative constitution of heterosexuality. Misogyny is a cultural effect which precedes, and proceeds from, individual utterance. It is, following Butler's logic of the performative, a site of ambivalence which not only constructs us, but also the possibility of our resistance to it.

The question Butler raises about the ambivalence of the drag in *Paris is Burning* as sometimes appropriative, sometimes subversive (128) is most approachable in the language of the ball queens. "Reading" in the ball queens' sense of the term best articulates the centrality of interpretive attitude to the intelligibility of sexed and gendered subjects. The effect of "realness" the queens seek – the ability to "pass" – is achieved only if they are unable to be read. In this context "reading" makes apparent the naturalisations which are produced in an unselfconscious (unbracketed) reading. Butler understands "reading" in this way:

when what appears and how it is "read" diverge, the artifice of the performance can be read as artifice; the ideal splits off from its appropriation. But the impossibility of reading means that the artifice works, the approximation of realness appears to be achieved, the body performing and the ideal performed appear indistinguishable. (129)

She questions the status of this performed ideal, but leaves open the question of the contexts and practices that make "reading" possible, or not. Although "reading" is in this context a question of interpreting what is seen, the term carries over into written text. Textually it becomes a question of whether or not a subject position is readable – denaturalised – and thus yields the strategies by which some subjects "pass" into discourse, and some remain unintelligible. This problem of "reading" is most horribly apparent in the killing – while the documentary was being filmed – of Venus Xtravaganza, a preoperative m2f transsexual sex-worker. Not surprisingly her killing, which remains at a dumb tangent to the documentary, is equally ineffable within those reviews of the film which take its subject positions as subversive interventions into the

sex/gender system. The ideal of subversiveness does not fit well with the very real *effects* of those subject positions played out in the world.

Butler suggests that 'her life is taken presumably by a client who, upon the discovery of what she calls her "little secret", mutilates her for having seduced him' (130). This is presuming far more than can be known about the psychic idealisations that were the conditions for her killer's violence. It is difficult to imagine *seduction*, in this of all contexts, of itself producing a killing intent. In performing an expressly commercial transaction, Venus was in a position of commodification. Where seduction is a function of the sale (where a sex-worker indexes seduction in order to negotiate a deal), it operates as a *mediated* seduction whose promises are framed by the exigencies of business. Where seduction in this context is a conventional part of the exchange, an act which rewards for your payment, it is less likely to provoke disappointed rage than are the romantic seductions which present as entirely volitional and outside of an economy of exchange: those culturally embedded seductions of romantic love. Butler may mean by "seduced", more narrowly, deceived, as if it is self-evidently the case that a client – here a man – would buy sex only from a biological female. Yet m2f sex-workers form a sizeable niche market in the sex industry. Venus Extravaganza's murder is caught up in the network of identifications and repudiations that marks sexed beings as we enter the symbolic, and which involves variant combinations of sexed, gendered and sexualised subject positions. But whatever psychic registrations of these constraints led her client to kill, they cannot be unquestionably reduced to the presumption that he "read" her, and that she thus failed to "pass".

If Venus's client knew Venus was an m2f transsexual and bought sex from her for that very reason then another reading of the killing is worth consideration. Granting that commercial transactions for sex are implicated with affective and symbolic exchanges, the client, as the consumer in the transaction, occupies the subject position in relation to Venus as object. Within an economic realm, that is, the client accedes to the position of a subject; but within the symbolic realm what position does his desire for Venus allow him to occupy? If sexualised subjects are representable within the symbolic only in terms of oppositions, then the abject Venus – preoperative m2f transsexual, "phallic woman", "feminised man", articulable only by these contemptuous reinscriptions of the sex/gender system – renders equally unintelligible the client's subjective identity. Within the symbolic his subject position is sustainable only at the cost of the annihilation of Venus. In the idealising fictions of *The Crying Game*, the resolution to the parallel situation was to create subjective space for the m2f transgenderist (and thus, more importantly for its narrative, for Fergus) by killing the

only "real" woman in the narrative. In *Paris is Burning*, where the consolations of fiction do not resolve the characters' subjective crises, the misogyny which generates the fantasy of complete and differentiated masculine subjectivity is instead acted out on the body of the person who denaturalises the oppositionality which underwrites that subjectivity. It is more likely the client's *inability* to read Venus, and himself, that led to her killing.

The problem of reading subject positions is necessarily accentuated by the multiple (gender, sex, sexuality, class, race ...) crossings of the subject by, and partiality of, those positions at any given moment. According to Butler, Venus's desire for 'an imaginary man who will designate a class and race privilege that promises a permanent shelter from racism, homophobia, and poverty' suggests that sexual difference is not prior to race or class difference in the constitution of the subject (130). Venus's desires about being a married housewife in the suburbs with all mod cons, suggest the reverse to me. They suggest that the heterosexual narrative that romances the figure of "woman" as she enters the generically unequal economic and cultural relations of marriage, has so permeated our psychic formations that its unintelligible "naturalness" promises relief from the decidedly unromanced narratives of class and race differences. Sometimes the effects of this romance – of this seduction – are killing. Butler understands the symbolic abjection of Venus – which she, too, takes as constitutive of her killer's desire – in relation to her being a Latina, not a white woman. In this way her death 'testifies to a tragic misreading of the social map of power, a misreading orchestrated by that very map according to which the sites for a phantasmatic self-overcoming are constantly resolved into disappointment' (131). Butler seems to locate Venus's inability to "pass" as white (whereas she *can* "pass" as a woman) at the centre of her death. There is certainly urgency to differentiate processes of subjectivity along lines of race, and of class, as well as sexual difference. But Butler's argument dramatises the difficulty of ceding priority in identity categories.

White femaleness might be constituted ambivalently by some black m2f drag as, in equal parts, goods in an erotic economy of exchange, and a site of consumer privilege (132), as Butler argues; the drag thus offers more than the simplistic reflexes of misogyny. But there is some kind of structural misogyny in operation here. Butler notes the abjecting strategy already in operation in *feminising* 'the poor, black, gay man', though, oddly, in order to refute the charge of misogyny in black m2f drag, as if those positions (feminised and misogynist) are mutually exclusive. Her argument protests too much because she treats misogyny here as an individually volitional attitude. Accusations that black men's drag is misogynist are simplistic, and it is odd

that Butler dedicates the energy she does to refuting them. But the cultural texts which generate the phantasm of idealised heterosexualised "woman" return to underwrite the terms of the drag performance.

In the drag balls where men "pass" as straight black men, or executives or military types, Butler's argument ignores gender in her analysis of class and race (because the congruence of their masculinity with the roles they assume makes gender "unreadable"?). Yet questions of gender in the drag context – a context constructed and defined by gender – are all but silenced by complications of class and race identifications (132). This is a peculiar emphasis which, in its anxiety not to override race and class as they perform abject subjectivities, introduces a hierarchised order in which the feminine is "unreadable" (naturalised). It "passes" as the always-already abject, and so a potential critique of its performativity is displaced onto, instead of included in, critiques of those other constitutive domains of subjectivity which are collapsed under the ideal of the feminised. This signals the subjective limits we still work within: that the "feminine" – whatever that may be – cannot be articulated alongside other abject domains.

In the following account in a pop-cultural magazine Oprah Winfrey describes an occasion where she was taken for a black transvestite and debarred from entering a Chicago department store. The scenario illustrates the complex interarticulation of race and gender in the face of cultural misrecognition.

They didn't recognize me because I was wearing my hair all kind of [...an airy gesture suggesting a mega-bouffant]. I was with my hairdresser, a black man, and the excuses they gave me were ... interesting. They hummed and they hummed and they hummed, and then they said that they'd been robbed the week before by two black transvestites! 'Oh, thank you very much', I said ... 'And we thought they'd come back...' 'OmyGad', I said, 'I'm changing my hairdo!'. Then I turned to my hairdresser and said, 'I think we are experiencing a *racial moment*'. At first you can't even believe that it's happening to you. 'So this is what it's like. Oh man!'. (my emphasis) (*HQ*, 1995: 104-07)

This is a metafeminisation at work. Leaving aside the abjecting of her hairdresser, Oprah is not *even* a black woman: she's doubly feminised as a black man failing to pass as a woman. And it registers for her as a "*racial moment*" (she had been forewarned by friends against taking a job in racist Chicago). This is an occasion where the spectre of transvestism is read not only in terms of sex and gender. The heterosexual recuperation of transgenderism is apparent when transvestite men come

to signify a body which overdraws (and thus distinguishes itself from "real") femininity. In this way a woman with a "mega-boufant" hairstyle is not a woman with a "mega-boufant" hairstyle; at least, not when she is black and trying to enter a ritzy white department store. She is a transvestite. In this recuperation for heterosexuality, a woman cannot resemble a transvestite. Contrary to arguments for the gender subversiveness of transvestism, the gender lines here are not blurred, but are redrawn in order to keep categories separate. Thus, if wearing a boufant signifies a transvestite man, it cannot signify a woman, in the same context. Moreover, Oprah's morphing body – the famous diets, the diet book, and the restaurant with the diet menu – has popularly been read in terms of her childhood sexual abuse. "Feminisation" as an abjecting strategy is clearly multidimensional, but in the context of a white economic and cultural hegemony, the outrageously genderist presumptions that restrict certain presentations of femininity to transvestite men, and black transvestite men to crime, yield to the question of race. This suggests that (not only in Chicago), especially if you are black, every moment is at least, though not exclusively, a racial moment. Interestingly, Oprah attributes the exclusions to the non-recognition of her star status. Television fame and the wealth it generates may well overwrite the more mundane subject positions of gender, sex and race; but a refusal to read it voids that position of its status.

If the potential subversiveness of drag for Butler has to do with 'the exposure or the failure of heterosexual regimes ever fully to legislate or contain their own ideals' (1993b: 237), then there is nothing to suggest that the control exercised over their gender identities by the ball queens in the ball context crosses over into control over their reception in broader social contexts. This is strikingly evident in Venus's case, but in a less fatal manner the ball queens' agency over their identities also met its match in a legal context. All but two of them brought action to receive a cut of the enormous profit generated by the film, but as they had signed a release their claims failed.⁸ The limitations on the subversiveness of drag in the film are thrown into relief against the backdrop of the legal context in which no self-avowed subjects were recognised.

In his analysis of the legal misrecognition which mistook the ball queens' subjectivity for Jennie Livingston's intellectual property, Harper implicitly suggests that the effectiveness of subjective agency turns on legal and critical reading practices. Like Butler, he draws a parallel between legal and symbolic constructions of the subject;

⁸ This is the subject of Harper (1994). I draw on his work to support my case about the legal limitations to the subversiveness of self-avowed subjectivity.

but to different critical effect. He argues that the juridical and drag ball contexts are both aspects of the public realm:

both sites are characterised by such activities of social *self-presentation* as are central not merely to the perpetuation of state authority and to the constitution of subjective identity but also to the exercise of community citizenship, the symbolism of market exchange, and the workings of mass media, all of which have been theorized as constituting the public sphere. (Harper, 1994: 92)

This shared realm 'suggests that the subjects of Livingston's film might substantively intervene in the one just as easily as in the other' (92). But the reason they do not is sourced in the interpretive practices brought to each context, and the respective cultural reach of the domain of intelligibility.

To draw out the differences, Harper first examines the character of the queens' agency in the ball context. Significant to Butler's performativity is that the political and discursive origins of gender are displaced by the psychological introjection of it as a true identity. Because the force of the performative derives from the legacy of the discursive acts that it cites, performativity is discursive. This is what undermines an essentialised, voluntaristic, and thus freely chosen, acquisition of gender. Harper notes, following Butler, that the performative aspect of the ball queens' identities cannot do the subversive work that many of the film's reviewers attribute to it.⁹ Butler has argued that, where it exists at all, the subversiveness of the drag is not in the plasticity of gender it might dramatise, but in its dramatisation of the psychic introjections by which heterosexual selves are constituted through the renunciation of the possibility of homosexuality. Harper identifies the difference between Farber's line and Butler's as the difference between 'the capacity for critical *deconstruction* [and] the ability to effect substantive social *reconstruction*' (94); and from this draws the major distinction between the public contexts of the ballroom and the courtroom. If, following Butler, the "real" subject produced in the drag ball is phantasmatically constituted, as are the normative subjects that the drag exposes, then the significant difference between them is one of contextual interpretation. That is to say, the "real"

⁹ For example Howell, reviewing the work-in-progress version of the film, typifies the awed reception of the Ball contestants "realness" (Harper, 1994: 90-91); Klawans remarks on Livingston as a white woman gaining the confidence of the black and Latin subjects, presuming that the film's viewers identify with her position (1994: 90, n 1); Farber finds subversive its demonstration of the 'sly mutability of identity', and the "realness" of the performances. Taking a part of the ball culture as generic of the scene, Howell deems "voguing" the subversive function of the balls. Farber, taking the constructing of identities to be the constructing of selves, implicitly attributes to the ball queens a transformative agency over their sociopolitical selves.

subject of drag is not discursively intelligible, whereas the normative subject is intelligible through indexing culturally sanctioned fantasies. The subject of drag mimes the processes of intelligibility – the sanctioned limits of gender and sexuality – by which it is kept marginal. This “realness”, however, turns out to be intelligible within, but not beyond, the ball scene (96).

Locating the difference between the ballroom and courtroom in their relations to subjects, Harper considers the ballroom corresponding to the imaginary and the courtroom to the symbolic realm:

the imaginary denotes the experiential mode in which a speaking subject conceives of itself as fully present in, represented by, and in control of the discourse that it produces. The symbolic, on the other hand, comprises the mode in which that subject recognizes the fundamental disjuncture between itself and its discursive representation. (96)

The subject in this sense is never fully present in its discursive self-representations, but negotiates the limits of itself in an oscillation between the symbolic and the imaginary states. When the subject oscillates toward the symbolic realm it cannot univocally reconstitute that realm but is instead accommodated to it. This marks the limit to the ball queens’ self-constitution when they exit the ballroom and enter the courtroom. The courtroom is thus the cultural mint of subjects, where the terms of a subject’s intelligibility are both recognised and reestablished. In this way the courtroom has socially constitutive effects which the ballroom cannot hope to counter, unless its terms are introduced across a larger cultural spectrum. This would involve a gradual realignment of reading practices to recognise and then reproduce terms other than those which power the sex/gender system. For Harper it would involve having the same kind of investment in economic and socio-symbolic capital which other more effective modes of cultural production, such as Jennie Livingston’s film, do. The transportation of the ball queens from their ballroom to the domain of the mass-media in Livingston’s film, although extending their public reach, ends up thwarting the ball queens’ subjectivities in favour of the *auteur*. Harper finds the journalistic reception of the film complicit in this in its prioritising interest in Livingston, as filmmaker, over the subject of her film; and in the film as, specifically, documentary. The film’s reception thus doubly authorises Livingston; and the intervention, if any, is registered as hers (98-9).

The ball queens signed away rights of torts law privacy (over public use of personal images) which are protected against undue appropriation (Harper, 1994: 99-101). The documents releasing Livingston from any liability for undue appropriation transferred

the intellectual property inhering in the images from the queens to Livingston. This legal context is the scene of the effacement of the queens' subjectivities in favour of Livingston's subjectivity as *auteur*. Any desire by the ball queens to achieve subjective agency by self-presentation in a broader sphere beyond the balls is effected at their relinquishment of that productive subjectivity, by signing away their intellectual property rights. Harper suggests that if the ball queens had the necessary capital for their own filmic self presentation, it would confer on their cultural commentary 'the "edge" that, in our eagerness to see their practice as subversive, we too easily forget it does not possess' (102). Though self-presentation is the significant issue in Livingston's documentary, economic capital cannot safeguard the translation of marginalised subjects into a broader cultural sphere. A reasonably common example of the catapult to publicly self-avowed subjectivity, by access to capital and media, is the criminal's autobiographical bestseller. Many perpetrators of notorious acts become the financial beneficiaries of media competition for an exclusive. If their stories are told (rather than censored by the law prohibiting proceeds from crime), they are readable within that genre of notoriety and are popular precisely because of their outsideness. Chopper Reid's story is one example. Public voyeurism may well pay for those who exhibit their notorious selves, but economic capital does not equate to cultural capital.

Harper's conclusion that the ball queens' self representation would gain an "edge" if tied to economic and cultural capital answers the *local* legal question of intellectual property which he carefully details. But there are more *general* legal questions of representation – which directly influence accession to economic and cultural capital – which are tied closely to notions of self-avowal and the ability to "read" the self thus avowed. At the beginning of her analysis of *Paris is Burning* Butler drew on Althusser's notion of the legal terms by which a subject comes to be socially constituted. This framed her argument about the real threat which motivates the subject's psychic assumption of "sex". Her argument mapped the means by which drag can act to reiterate hyperbolically and thus "read" the normative character of the assumed "sex". This possible subversion of the truth of sex is limited, though, to those contexts which do not always bear the full force of the threat by which they are produced. The ballroom of *Paris is Burning* is an example of such a context. The legal context may not be the originary context of the psychically sexed subject – if such an origin could be known. Nevertheless, as it negotiates the cultural circulation of discursive and economic capital, it is the site where the threat discussed above is most egregiously operated. Here I turn to analyse legal readings of self-avowed transgenderists to determine the law's role in the success or failure of subjects to pass into cultural intelligibility.

2 TRANSSEXUALS IN COURT

A transsexual is conventionally taken to be a person who understands their gender identity to be in conflict with their sexed identity. The idea of conflict can only arise, needless to say, because of the "either/or" ness of the sex/gender system where gender is pronounced at birth in congruence with one's genital sex. The scene of this initial engenderment for many is medical: the hospital where they are "delivered" from their mother. A transsexual is understood to believe that she is a woman trapped in a male body, or a man trapped in a female body. It is on the basis of this being "trapped" that the transsexual identity diverges from that of a transvestite, or other sexual free-player. In its provision of diagnosis and sex re-assignment, the medical context is also the birthplace of a transsexual – and is the context from which the law takes its cue on authorising a transsexual's chosen identity.

In medical practice you cannot simply choose another sex in the way that you can choose another nose, facial profile or other assorted bodily upgrades from the plastic surgery catalogue. You have to experience a psychic incompatibility with the sex you are "in", so to speak. Medical discourses operating within a mutually constitutive, if not always open, dialogue with legal and other cultural discourses, exert a culturally disproportionate degree of influence within the sex/gender system. There is no professional or disciplinary point of origin, though, as the definition of "system" suggests, for the determination of sex and gender. So, when the Law requires an individual intelligible as such within the terms of the sex/gender system (man/male, or woman/female), medicine delivers one. As Medicine constructs a gendered and sexed individual, the Law renegotiates its interpretation of individual status in relation to it. Significantly, both discursive domains work hard to exclude the position of homosexuality from the position of transgenderist.

G. C. McColl's research into transgenderists at the Gender Dysphoria Clinic at the Monash Medical Centre (Australia's only public hospital providing sex-reassignment surgery) explores the cultural authority operating through medical diagnoses of transgenderist "patients":

when ... a male seeking male-to-female reassignment denies his homosexuality, insisting that he desires sex with men because he is a woman, the doctor must ascertain whether there is any religious or moral reason why he might be proclaiming his transsexuality and denying his *homosexuality*. (my emphasis) (McColl, 1995: 50)

The medical profession's investment in the innateness of gender difference possibly influences that conviction in transgenderists. To get what they want, they have to speak the same language. A transsexual interviewed by McColl described the psychiatric assessments as "play-acting" in which the doctor 'only gets what we give him' (50). Indeed, biological truths do not stand alone in this domain, as much of the criteria used for medical assessment invoke notions of gender performance and psychology, to predict whether or not the patient will be "acceptable" in their chosen gender. In Britain until the 1980s questions asked of f2ms reiterated such cultural idiocies as 'can you mend a fuse? do you know about car engines? how are you with mechanical things?' (49). A transsexual's potential attractiveness as a member of the newly chosen gender is taken into account by doctors. One psychiatrist said 'we mustn't turn them into freaks' (50). The medical profession, backed up by the legal profession is anxious not to be seen to be assisting in the construction of polymorphous perverts. An urgent biological "need" for a patient to change and properly inhabit a gender can be "humanely" met; but to qualify they have to out-perform the "natural" inhabitants of their chosen gender – no homosexuals or schizophrenics, for example. And no women who look like freaks. The treatment of transsexualism as a psychological (and surgically remediable) disorder, rather than as another form of desire, effectively reproduces the sex/gender system. What might it take to have the medical profession comply with the whole gamut of transgenderist desires, as it does already for those who desire to alter any other aspect of their biology via plastic surgery? And what part does the biological determinism of medical discourse play in the phantasmatic introjection of the sense that one is trapped in a body discordant with their gender identity, that one's gender is prior to one's sex?

Medical and legal interpellations of the subject are thus informed by an understanding that psychological disposition accords with normalised perceptions of biological sex. Whereas earlier legal decisions determined sexual identity biologically, in terms of chromosomal, gonadal and genital sex, recent cases present a shift toward psychological disposition and gender orientation as determinants of legal identity.¹⁰ For transgenderists to represent the cultural crisis of gender and sex categories in the way that Garber characterises them, the Law would have to have rethought its interpellating strategies beyond the dualism it currently operates. It would have to have allowed for other sexed and gender identities which include transgenderists as transgenderists, instead of inferring from the mind and bodies of transgenderists one or

¹⁰ I draw material on recent legal cases involving the question of transsexual identity from Muller (1994).

other gender and concomitant sex. As this examination of cases illustrates, the Law has done no such thing.

2.1 *Corbett's congruence test*

Corbett v Corbett is an English case often cited in subsequent cases involving transsexuals (1970 2 All ER p 33–55). The case involved determining the status of a marriage between a man who was not transsexual and an m2f postoperative transsexual. Justice Ormrod rearticulated as crucial a connection between biology and “natural heterosexual intercourse” for marriage. He held that ‘marriage was essentially a relationship between man and woman, and the respondent being a biological male from birth, the so-called marriage was void’ (33). He deemed marriage ‘essentially heterosexual’ and thus valid or voidable, on the basis of the biological (in this case, genital) oppositeness of its constituents. This was to ensure that both parties to a marriage are ‘naturally capable of performing the essential role in marriage’. He was explicitly critical of the moral and legal implications of sex-reassignment surgery and drew on the consensus of medical witnesses that ‘the biological sexual constitution of an individual is fixed at birth and cannot be changed’ (49).¹¹ Similar principles of biologically determined reproductive sexuality were invoked in *Françoise B v Mark B*, formerly known as *Marsha B*, a New York case in 1974. In a classic expression of the conflation of penis and phallus, the marriage between a woman and her postoperative f2m transsexual husband was deemed invalid because the husband had no male genitals and so was unable to ‘function as a man for the purposes of procreation’ (500).¹² Both cases separate sex from gender and favour the former category as the criteria for true identity.

The consequences of legal misrecognition of subjects are strikingly apparent in an Australian case in 1979 which followed *Corbett*.¹³ Applying the so-called congruence test from *Corbett*, where one’s sex is determined by the congruence of chromosomal,

¹¹ Yet if the biological sex at birth were taken to be the determining factor in a sexed/gendered subject position for the purposes of safely oppositional heterosexual marriage, many marriages currently recognised would not pass muster. McColl’s research explains why:

[m]edical discourse postulates a biological or sexed body which is established, variously, by chromosomal sex, gonadal sex, hormonal sex, internal accessory reproductive structures and external genital morphology. There are, however, thousands of documented cases in which these “essential” signs of gender are not mutually congruent. (1994: 49)

¹² Yet the procreative function, here deemed the core of marriage, is not always held to be so. There is no legal injunction to married people to produce children, and marriages are not rendered invalid on the basis of no biological issue, or no desire for biological issue. In both cases the transsexuals were biologically capable of having what is conventionally understood to be heterosexual sex with their partners, but not of sexual reproduction: an identical situation to when infertility is discovered in married couples.

¹³ See Bailey (1994). Bailey does not provide case details.

gonadal and genital sex, Justice Bell determined that for the purposes of marriage the hermaphrodite husband was 'neither man nor woman but a combination of both' (Bailey, 1994: 660). It was open to Bell J on the logic of *Corbett*, given that he ignored the hermaphrodite's surgical operation to become a husband, to interpret the hermaphrodite as fortuitously capable of performing either "role" for the purposes of marriage. He held instead that the husband was not eligible for marriage at all. This perfect opportunity to recognise *legally* a sex other than the conventional and oppositional two (for, assuredly the judge recognised this other sex *biologically*), was lost to the reflex to reassert, in the face of evidence to the contrary, the *naturalness* of the sex/gender system to the cultural ritual – marriage – which articulates it. The Law has long been aware of the popular appeal of circular assertions about the self-evidence of what is natural: nature, that is to say, is where the buck stops in the accountability of legal argument. An unarticulated well of cultural "belief" is tapped, by the Law, for its moral resources; and in its coming into legal discourse these beliefs take on the status (of cultural Law) they were invoked to reinforce (as moral law). If this process, inflected through legal argument, belongs more broadly to textual practices in general (which can not recognise disciplinary boundaries), then "reading" these naturalising processes is a necessary, if not sufficient, prerequisite to changing them.¹⁴

More recently in Australia, legal decisions about transsexual identity tended toward a consideration of the postoperative subject's own sense of identity, in what looked like promising progress toward a recognition of self-avowed identification. In *R v Harris and McGuiness*, a 1989 NSW Court of Criminal Appeal case, it was held that for the purposes of the *criminal* law an m2f transsexual who had undergone full sex reassignment surgery was to be deemed a woman, but an m2f transsexual who had not had surgery was not female, irrespective of her psychological sex. Then in *HH v Department of Social Security*, a 1991 Brisbane Administrative Appeals Tribunal case, it was held that the biological test in *Corbett* was inconclusive and that a postoperative transsexual's psychological and social sex were relevant in determining their gender identity, as was the irreversibility of the sex reassignment surgery. Given the *sine qua non* of sex-reassignment surgery to the legal endorsement of the avowed subjectivity, both these cases of course reinforce the approval given to those who demonstrate a real commitment to being one or other (but not both, or some other) sex. The Federal Court

¹⁴ Muller notes that in addition to these cases, even supposedly progressive legal views of transsexual identity recuperate transsexualism for the sex/gender system (1994: 109). Indeed, insofar as a transsexual can function in the role of their surgically assumed gender, they have the legal recognition in relation to marriage that lesbians and gay men do not. If this demonstrates nothing else it demonstrates that the cultural *raison d'être* for the concepts of sex and gender is founded in the transgenerational transmission of property regulated by the legal institution of marriage.

has more recently articulated limits to the agency of self-avowed subjects. In a 1992 AAT case, *SRA v Department of Social Security*, a preoperative m2f transsexual (who wanted but could not afford sex reassignment surgery) was held to be entitled to a wife's pension. The Tribunal said that psychology – a person's 'inner belief as to their own identity' – determined sex, more than anatomical approximation did. Indeed the psychological factor is what 'distinguishes the transsexual from the homosexual, the transvestite and perhaps the hermaphrodite' (cited in Muller, 1994: 115). Her *desire* for sex reassignment surgery was still influential in the Tribunal's decision. Importantly, though, the AAT's decision was overturned on appeal to the Full Federal Court which reinstated the obligatory correlation between a transsexual's biological and psychological sex, thus reemphasising the mutual constitutiveness of biology and culture (of sex and gender). Preoperative transsexuals, it would seem, threaten to stretch the mind/body split beyond reason. Whatever the law is refusing to "read" in these transsexuals subjectivities, it is clear that Butler's argument about the psychic dramatisation of heterosexual melancholy enacted in drag cannot answer the legal disinterest in psychic self-avowal, hyperbolised or not. The shifting sands on which sex and gender are (re)assembled in legal discourse reintroduce biology as a fixture when gender is distorted beyond the law's field of vision. Those shifting sands form the basis for the subject to stand before the court. I complete this section on legal discourse with analysis of the legal concept of standing, without which the subject is refused dialogue with the Law.

2.2 Standing

When a subject announces itself, what content is inferable? Does "homosexual" designate lesbians and gay men? Does "lesbian" include self-identified lesbians, women who have same-sex desire, and m2f transsexuals who identify erotically with women?¹⁵ Problematizing the partiality of these descriptors is not motivated by nostalgia for distinct categories which offer one-to-one correspondence with those they describe. It is just that the question of subject positions rests on the culturally pragmatic fantasy that one can, indeed must, authentically assume one or other of the preordained categories in order to come into discourse. To the question 'who speaks?' – implicit in the use of those categories – one might counterpose as equally valid the question 'who wants to know?' This throws the onus to declare back to its source, in a given context. It demands of the first question a reciprocal declaration of its source of

¹⁵ A local encounter with these questions stalled the progress of the Lesbian Space Project, a fund-raising enterprise to buy a building to create lesbian space. When a vote decided that membership of the project was restricted to 'female-born women who identify as lesbians', and that lesbian space did not extend its reach to m2f transsexual lesbians, the co-convenor withdrew from the project her \$20 000 donation (*Lesbians on the Loose*, 1995: 3, 5).

authority. Although it initiates an infinite regress ('who wants to know who wants to know?') it does so profitably. Originary subjectivity is never reachable because the avowed speaking position cannot put the brakes on the infinite regress of identification. It challenges the surety that signifiers and referents are aligned when uttered as truth. But 'who wants to know?' has no traction on its interrogator if the dialogue it instigates is refused by the monologic drive of the first question.

In 'Critically Queer' Butler says about the "I" who speaks:

I can only say "I" to the extent that I have first been addressed, and that address has mobilized my place in speech; paradoxically, the discursive condition of social recognition *precedes and conditions* the formation of the subject: recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms that subject. (1993b: 226)

Here Butler asserts the structural effacement of volition in the construction of subjects. It is a straightforward point which nevertheless requires careful articulation to provoke a more than surface awareness in critical practice. According to the Law, however, not only is it not remarkable (or newly revealing) that recognition forms a subject, it is positively legislated for in the rules governing standing. When the Law asks: "who speaks?", the source of the subject's response is "standing". *Locus standi*, a place of standing, underwrites the right to be heard in a court or other proceeding. Standing is the legal instrumentation of the right to speak. It confers leave to appeal to a higher court against the decision of a lower court, or to mount a constitutional challenge in the High Court.¹⁶ Being party to a contractual disagreement, property dispute, industrial accident, criminal assault and so on necessarily renders one eligible to seek legal remedy against another relevant party or parties. The right to 'have your day in court' is a commonplace. The question of standing arises only when a challenge is mounted against the legislature or judiciary. Standing is directly related to the right of an individual (or group) to question the authority of the highest authority in the land.

¹⁶ An important example of standing in relation to a constitutional challenge is the famous North American case *Roe v Wade*. "Jane Roe" wanted an abortion, which was illegal in Texas. In order to obtain one she had to mount a challenge to the State regulation on abortion. She became the catalyst for lawyers who wanted to contest the law on abortion but who lacked standing – not being pregnant – to initiate a challenge themselves. By the time her case came up she was no longer in the position of a pregnant woman wanting an abortion. The term of her pregnancy had well past, and she had had the child. The attorney for Wade ran the line that as "Roe" was no longer pregnant and seeking a lawful abortion, she did not have standing to plead the case for legal abortion. The judges rightly dismissed this, in consideration of the specific issue of time for a pregnant subject. On the attorney's logic a pregnant woman would have standing only for the duration of gestation, a period much shorter than the average waiting time for a case to be heard. "Roe" functioned as the "real" referent so that a matter of principle could be heard in a court: except in name she was not present at or a party to the hearings.

There is therefore a long tradition in the common law governing the application and discretionary allocation of standing. The tradition reaches back to the seventeenth-century negotiations of the rights of subjects in England's transition from a Kingdom to a constitutional monarchy.¹⁷ The test for standing was the designation, by the courts, of applicants as "persons grieved" (by the decision or law being challenged), who achieved standing, and "strangers" or "mere busybodies", who did not.

The famously liberal Lord Denning sought to reduce the scope of a court's discretion in regard to standing for particular legal remedies – *prohibition* and *certiorari* – remedies which, providing one has standing to seek them, allow appeals to a court of superior jurisdiction. This was so that anyone but the "mere busybody" would be taken by courts to have standing. In a series of cases between 1966 and 1976 the opposition between "persons grieved" and "mere strangers" was replaced by a distinction between members of the public whose interests are affected and mere busybodies who seek to interfere in matters which do not concern them, with the latter category construed narrowly.¹⁸ Denning's approach received only qualified support and in England the common law rules of standing have been replaced by a statutory test of "sufficient interest". Since a High Court decision in 1980, Australian common law as to standing has developed differently from English law, and Australian courts now apply the test for a special interest in the subject matter of the action. The history of judicial disagreement in application of the test suggests a lingering reluctance to grant the

¹⁷ The Law's authority to speak is textually derived. This can be organised into three main categories. (i) *history*: conventions of interpretation, the authority of precedent, and in Australia, the precedential authority of the British Empire; (ii) *statutory regulation*: government legislation, determined principally by the economic imperative of electoral support; and (iii) *the constitution*: a text written by property-owning anglo-Australian men at the turn of the century, authorised by the British Empire, in the person of the Queen (it opens with the reliance of the people of Australia 'on the blessing of Almighty God', and its 128 sections are empowered in this way: 'Be it therefore enacted by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty ... as follows...'). When Australia becomes a republic the likely introduction of an autochthonous – a 'we the people' – constitution will align the country more with the USA than the UK. The constitution will no longer reach back through the imagined lineage from a monarch to God for its authority but will, as a performative text, draw its "authority" from "the people" as "we" speak it. This will not remove the author-function of the document, of course, but will simply shift it symbolically from a transcendent signifier to a rhetorically immanent and plural one. The USA constitution, although rhetorically a self-authoring document is itself governed by laws of convention. Written in iambic pentameter it is situated not at a beginning but along an imagined continuum of classical tradition, regulated formally by rules of poetics and governed by conventions of interpretation.

¹⁸ Denning expressed his desire to effectively abolish the rules of standing in his 'high constitutional principle':

I regard it as a matter of high constitutional principle that if there is a good ground for supposing that a government department or a public authority is transgressing the law, or is about to transgress it, in a way which offends or injures thousands of Her Majesty's subjects, then any one of those offended or injured can draw it to the attention of the courts of law and seek to have the law enforced, and the courts in their discretion can grant whatever remedy is appropriate. (*R v Greater London Council*, 1976: 559)

remedies sought. Given that the modern origins of standing can be sourced at the shift from a monarch's "pleasure" to choose (or choose not) to grant their subjects leave to speak, the taint of the mystification, or unaccountability, of authority is still evident in this reluctance of the judiciary to open itself to question.¹⁹

The judiciary's operational costs, in money and time, inevitably contribute to the limits drawn on public access to judicial review: economics and authority are mutually constitutive. So an important note here is that standing is not separable from the remedy for which the applicant requests standing to seek. Thus a judicial bias against certain remedies (such as the remedy to appeal to a superior court against an inferior court's decision) informs the criteria applied to decide an applicant's standing. Standing never inheres in the *person* of an applicant. It amounts to a decision by the hearing judges about whether or not an applicant has a right to question the authority of the legislature or judiciary, two of the three nominally separate arms of government. If standing is denied, the case is foreclosed.

The legal concept of standing is the process whereby subjects enter into discourse with the Law. Standing underwrites the allocation of subject positions, and manifests the unilaterality of subjectivity and recognition. Judicial practices of reading ascribe a *place* to the subject, deciding who can "pass" before the courts. This ensures that in the case of transgenderism, the transgenderist it recognises – deems intelligible – is one who reinscribes the oppositionality of the sex/gender system. The subjectivity circulated by the judiciary is partial and exterior. It does not inhere in the individual subject, as the practice of conferring standing makes clear; rather, subjectivity is alternately read off or projected onto the individual to complete the chain of judicial citation and to regulate the defining fictions of judicial history – and its subjects. If a self-avowed subject position is constitutively dependent on its reception, as the legal context illustrates, then it is crucial to set into circulation reading practices that render such positions intelligible.

¹⁹ Courts also have limits on their own power to speak. They are able to make decisions only within their designated jurisdiction. Jurisdiction is determined in a hierarchy of courts (in descending order, the High Court, Federal and Family Courts, State Supreme courts, County courts, Magistrates courts) and tribunals; the latter's jurisdiction determined by statutory legislation. A court is often referred to as competent (or not) to decide the issue. Jurisdiction works as a right and a duty. A superior court will intervene in the decision of an inferior court if the latter declines its jurisdiction, or has decided a matter in excess of its jurisdiction. Importantly, a superior court will not intervene if an inferior court has decided a matter incorrectly, so long as the decision was within its jurisdiction; a practice which ensures that the right to speak supervenes the quality, and regulatory effects, of the decision.

How might reading practices disarticulate subjectivity and place? How might they facilitate subjective self-determination without the requirement of grounding for that subjectivity, without insisting on a place from which to speak? If the progress of the subject is a circular exchange through interconnecting discourses of Law, Medicine and Culture then a strategy for subjective self-determination might reasonably take linguistic form. Here I refer to a debate between Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler about methods of self-avowal, in which Sedgwick seeks to apply Butler's performativity to troping in language. The promise in Sedgwick's proposition lies in its selection of the speech act. The speech act is a figure of language which performs in its utterance and thus showcases language exceeding its own system; it appears to conjure its referents without external agency. As a serious attempt to rethink subjectivity Sedgwick's argument requires attention. Here I consider what it offers and define the residue it leaves in its confrontation with the sex/gender system. Sedgwick situates her speech acts analysis within the institution of marriage, as the quintessential site for the performative power of language. This section extends my earlier discussion of marriage and transvestite men (Chapter 1), and analysis of the legal interpretations of marriage (above), to reconsider the impact of the institution in its recitation of gender.

3 PERFORMATIVITY

Sedgwick's article, appearing in the first issue of GLQ raised questions about the subject within identity politics and queer theory. It is her response to Butler's performativity in *Gender Trouble*. Rather than literalise Butler's metaphor of performativity as others did, Sedgwick explores divergent uses and meanings of "performativity" in contemporary theoretical discourses. In particular, she moves the idea of performativity into the arena of language with a focus on the linguistic and grammatical subversions of the sex/gender system.

Drawing on the deconstructive thinking of Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller, she notes that performativity 'seems to be characterized by the *dislinkage* precisely of cause and effect between the signifier and the world' (Sedgwick, 1993: 2) and for this reason, 'one might want to dwell not so much on the non-reference of the performative but rather on (what de Man calls) its necessarily "aberrant" relation to its own reference – the torsion, the mutual perversion as one might say, of reference and performativity' (2). Her concern is with distortions of signification, rather than non-signification.

Sedgwick traces the intellectual history of the category "performativity" back to the English philosopher J. L. Austin and his 1955 Harvard lectures, published as *How to Do*

Things With Words. Although under the influence of deconstruction "performativity" can be seen as a function of *all* utterance, Austin had introduced "performativity" as a *specific* category of utterances and dwelled on particular examples of performative utterance which he treats as marginal limit cases: 'Famously, these are a cluster of sentences in the first person singular present indicative active' (Sedgwick, 1993: 3) which do not *describe* the doing but which *are* the doing *in the utterance*. Examples are "I promise...", "I bet...", "I apologise", "I sentence you" and so on, but his most important and frequent example is "I do..." in terms of the marriage ceremony. The idea here is that a performative utterance (such as "I do") is an act in the world beyond its own status as language. Austin's use of these utterances in his lectures as examples of his concept of "performativity" of course disables their performative qualities in the process. When for example "I do..." is uttered not in its performative context – the marriage ceremony – but is named in inverted commas as an example of performativity, its agency is momentarily undermined because it is not enacting its meaning. It is in Sedgwick's words "performatively, voided in advance" (3). Those performatives which enact by simply being uttered readily yield their authority when operated outside of their authorising contexts. What makes them imperative is not always and inevitably so: a performative is not always already performing. This point is crucial to my understanding of Sedgwick's use of the concept. Whereas that makes me think about ways of working backwards toward those authorising frames which enable performatives to perform, it makes Sedgwick think in the other direction toward a different kind of performative.²⁰

Sedgwick identifies the necessarily heterosexual nature of these performatives by addressing

the apparently natural way the first-person speaking, acting, and pointing subject ... gets constituted in marriage through a confident appeal to state authority, through the calm interpellation of others present as 'witnesses', and through the logic of the (heterosexual) supplement whereby individual subjective agency is guaranteed by the welding into a cross-gender dyad. (3)

²⁰ When I generalise here about authorising frames I have in mind what I take to be the gist of Foucault's historiography. Considering his major works together, I take from Foucault that what powers discourse in a given period are the unconscious "truths" of the dominant institutions. If history in his genealogies represents a disconnected range of discursive practices, where each practice is governed by rules and procedures for writing and thinking in a given field, then those fields interact to form a culture's "archive". The rules which underwrite those fields of knowledge are not accessible to any individual consciousness while those fields retain influence. Discernment of the rules is a matter of historical retrospection.

So if "I do" is performative of the logic of the heterosexual supplement, of necessarily heterosexual subjectivity; if the performative "I do..." invokes "monogamous heterosexual dyadic church- and state-sanctioned marriage [as] at the definitional center of an entire philosophical edifice" (3); if "I do..." draws its performative force from those prediscursive frameworks which vest "I do" with cultural meaning, how can the subjectivity of the queer-identified be performed? For Sedgwick such an analysis of performativity offers an opportunity for queer subjectivity to establish itself through the performance of provisionality and critique:

persons who self-identify as queer, by contrast, will be those whose subjectivity is lodged in refusals or deflections of (or by) the logic of the heterosexual supplement; in far less simple associations attaching to state authority; in far less complacent relation to the witness of others. The emergence of the first person, of the singular, of the present, of the active, and of the indicative are all questions, rather than presumptions, for queer performativity. (4)

Her example of a queer performative, in contrast to Austin's "I do..." is "shame on you". Like Austin's examples, she argues, "it names itself", "it has its illocutionary force (the conferral of shame) in and by specifying its illocutionary intent", "it depends on the interpellation of witnesses" and though it still occurs, as do Austin's examples, "within a pronoun matrix" this begins with the second person, with the first-person subject – the "I" – of the statement deferred and thus always evocable in *different* ways, a subject position (an "I") which can be questioned but not presumed. My difficulty with this position arises over the question of reading positions. What role does the reader or audience play in self-proclaimed subjectivities whose signification lacks an authorising fame? Can a queer-identified subject answer to the problem of being nevertheless read and interpellated otherwise? Doesn't identity necessarily invoke an audience? My larger concern with Sedgwick's position is the direction in which it leads, as the effacement of a speaking subject in her queer performative – the deferred "I" – becomes a literal self-effacement. The queer performative, that is to say, is the performance of self-effacement. Sedgwick continues,

The absence of an explicit verb from "Shame on you" records the place in which an I, in conferring shame, has effaced itself and its own agency. Of course the desire for self-effacement is the defining trait of – what else? – shame. (4)

The queer performative in this construction enacts a grammatical effacement of its own subjectivity – it defers its "I" from the field – and at the same time enacts a semantic conferral of shame on "you". This is a stroke of intellectual ingenuity that deploys the

grammatical site of subjectivity as the means both to articulate subjectivity that is resistant to the logic of the heterosexual supplement, and to enact a critique of that logic. The effacement of agency in this performative parallels Butler's reading of the performativity of melancholia in (m2f) drag. Sedgwick's queer performative dramatises the shaming effects of heterocentrism, allowing the queer subject to enter the grammatical codes of subjectivity from that position of shame, in the act of conferring it onto "you". In its conferral of shame on the "you" of the heterosexual supplement the queer subject effaces itself and thus purportedly acts from its defining trait, shame. Self-effacement records the violence perpetrated by the logic that queer means to disrupt, but it works from the perspective of pathos and thus structures its address as a plea. Its representational possibilities thus mark its limits. The position works either as a repetition (in reverse) of subject-object relations, or as the transmission of pathos (my shame is your shame) that is constitutively dependent on the shaming audience for its performance.

Butler's response to Sedgwick (in the same issue of *GLQ*) continues the theorisation of the relation between heterosexual performativity and a "queer" performative. She too problematises the reversibility of shame-conferral when the performativity has its ground zero in the marriage institution. Returning to the authorising contexts for performativity, she asks: if heterosexuality is paradigmatic of performativity then 'where and when does such a performative draw its force, and what happens to the performative when its purpose is precisely to undo the presumptive force of the heterosexual ceremonial?' (Butler, 1993b: 17). Aligning her argument with Derrida on performatives she situates the authority of the speech act not in the intention of the speaker but through a prior action which it echoes. The speech act

accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices. What this means, then, is that a performative "works" to the extent that it draws on and covers over the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized. In this sense, no term or statement can function performatively without the accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force. (19)

It is the context and audience that invest the performative with its more than rhetorical power, with its agency. That is why weddings require witnesses. The significant absence in Sedgwick's optimistic reversal is the accumulation of force without which the queer performative is more likely a queer rhetoric, "performatively, voided in advance".

Is the logic of the heterosexual supplement (and its cognates of gender hierarchy *etc.*) to be successfully challenged from within language, by a reworking of pronoun, as Sedgwick's treatment of "performativity" suggests? Or is it to be challenged from elsewhere, from those formations already in place (inherited knowledges, state authority, preconceptions, rules which govern systems of signification, Foucault's cultural "archives") which provide a context for the signification of speech acts? Sedgwick proposes that queer subjective agency, in performing itself discursively, can distort or disarticulate the logic of the heterosexual supplement. However, if speech acts derive their force from those prior conditions which provide their context – and which are themselves heterocentrally organised and organising – this distortion from within can be destabilising, but is it sufficient to alter those very contexts which render it distortive? It seems that wherever the focus is placed on the question of subjective formation, that formation is elsewhere. The elsewhere of subjectivity, when the focus is on pronominal and discursive subjectivity, is those formations which contextualise subjectivity in language. So how can they be named and rethought? Sedgwick's position cannot account for the constitutive force of reading practices. Queer self-identification as a transient strategy for individual and community empowerment is readable in a particular notion of the oppositional/political; but as a longer term strategy for disrupting the logic of the heterosexual supplement it promises no way of reaching beyond a sympathetic readership. In both the journal and book versions of 'Critically Queer' Butler addresses the extra-literary sources of authorisation in her focus on judicial citation. Where Sedgwick applied an extra-literary function (speech acts) to the literary, Butler applies a literary function to the extra-literary domain of the Law.

3.1 Citation

A judge's citation of legal precedent exemplifies performativity for Butler:

though it may appear that the binding power of his words is derived from the force of his will or from a prior authority, the opposite is more true: it is *through* the citation of the law that the figure of the judge's "will" is produced and that the "priority" of textual authority is established. Indeed, it is through the invocation of convention that the speech act of the judge derives its binding power; that binding power is to be found neither in the subject of the judge nor in his will, but in the citational legacy by which a contemporary "act" emerges in the context of a chain of binding conventions. (1993a: 225)

This reminder that the judge's authority is not fully voluntaristic comes across as overstatement. If not "will", then it is vital to include in the judge's act of citation

some reference to agency: judges interpret as well as cite. Power and authority do not inhere in the body of the judge. In 'Phantasmatic Identification' Butler reminds that the phallus does not designate a material referent but an abstract fear of loss of authority'; a fear only partially assuaged by the repetitions of the phallus. Thus assumption of authority is always incomplete, in process, and ghosted by the anxiety of its loss (of castration, in the metaphors of psychoanalysis). Moreover, the structuralist critique of the Author (in Barthes, and, differently, Foucault) reminds that authority resides more in the *idea* of structural authority than in any specific utterance of it. If judges reach back to precedential convention for the content of the law, to what conventions do they reach for the choices they make between one or other precedent?²¹ This is the question for a transformative politics of self-avowed subjectivity.

Citation cannot itself constitute a positive resignifying practice. Citation of gender norms may well continually re-, and sometimes de-, constitute those norms; but the interpretive contexts of that citation render its forcefulness. For this reason a focus on those contexts must be incorporated in a critique of identity.²² Butler alludes to reading practices as partially constitutive of performative acts, which she defines as 'forms of authoritative speech', in a footnote referring to Paul de Man's essay 'Rhetoric of Persuasion' (Butler, 1993a: 225, n 4). She quotes him on the *fictional* status of constative and performative utterances, and the consequent limits on their ability to be acts: 'considered as persuasion, rhetoric is performative, but considered as a system of tropes, it deconstructs its own performance' (de Man, cited in Butler, 1993a: 225). Tropes of language have no intrinsic quality. Reading practices are preeminently constitutive of the tropes summoned to articulate a subject. If discourse can produce what it names, then the performative exemplifies a domain where power acts as discourse. But that power works its effects through its being read as such.

Butler's text gestures to its own participation in the citation of authority, her own repetitions of her analysis effect its rhetorical power:

²¹ In Butler's North American context, the political attitude of a judge is implicit in their popular election to office, rather than being appointed as in Australia.

²² Citation incidentally takes on a self-conscious literality in the "hate speech" Butler refers to early in the chapter. Rush Limbaugh, a popular example of the overrated, overpaid and overexposed "beleaguered white man" who has a radio talk show in New York, has fans who without irony refer to themselves as "ditto heads"; "dittos" for short. The ditto signifies that 'whatever Limbaugh says, ditto for me'. His fans thus identify themselves as endorsing and repeating *in advance* whatever comes out of Limbaugh's programme. This exemplifies a context where dramatising the workings of authority – exposing citation of authority not as a truth but as an allegiance to power – does not of itself subvert those workings, but reinforces them.

there is no power, construed as a subject, that acts, but only, *to repeat an earlier phrase*, a reiterated acting that *is* power in its persistence and instability. This is less an "act", singular and deliberate, than a nexus of power and discourse that repeats or mimes the discursive gestures of power. (my emphasis) (225)

Butler's compelling thought bytes register authoritatively in their cumulative functioning. But this repetition does not in itself guarantee the authority of her text. She alludes to this in her conclusion about performatives:

[t]he reach of their signifiability cannot be controlled by the one who utters or writes, since such productions are not owned by the one who utters them. They continue to signify in spite of their authors, and sometimes against their authors' most precious intentions. (241)

The hate speech to which she refers earlier in the chapter is only one of many sources for the anxiety motivating her reflection here. Butler also seems to be negotiating the limits of what is possible for self-avowed (here "critically queer") subjectivities. Her analysis of the unchosen inheritance of the symbolic – the chain of citation which reaches back before us and forward beyond us – is above all about this. It is worth reciting most of her final paragraph to complete my point:

[i]t is one of the ambivalent implications of the decentring of the subject to have one's writing be the site of a necessary and inevitable expropriation. But this yielding of ownership over what one writes has an important set of political corollaries, for the taking up, reforming, deforming of one's own words does open up a difficult future terrain of community, one in which the hope of ever fully recognizing oneself in the terms by which one signifies is sure to be disappointed. (241-42)

The articulation of these limits as "expropriation" and thus never 'fully recognizing oneself' invoke the two central elements – property and standing – in the operation of judicial authority. This instability of the subject in language represents 'the unstable and continuing condition of the "one" and the "we", the ambivalent condition of the power that binds' (242). In this text Butler achieves an articulation of what I call the polymorphous perversity of power. If the effect of symbolic ambivalence compels us to decide, then how we decide, who and how and what we choose to interpret, marks our positions – however provisional – in the citational network. It is not *what* we decide – which subject position – but decision as a process of compelled choosing, that creates space for interpretation. Choice ensures that subjects are in process, negotiated, existing in dialogic relation to others. A non-static model such as this no longer

consigns some subjects/objects to the always-already of "otherness" which, despite the occasional romance of "the outsider" that some criticism narrates, can never deliver the relief from injury which legally constructed economically embedded subjects must negotiate. The danger attending this process, however, is the individually operable power to withdraw dialogue unilaterally.

If, in this conception of subjectivity, subjects exist only and always in interpretive dialogue with other subjects, then a refusal of dialogue is a refusal of that subject. This refusal does not equate to a partial silencing; it equates to subjective nonexistence. The inevitably mutual constitutiveness of subjects calls for a subtle awareness and consciousness of those processes, in order to exceed the subject-object reflex and expand the possibilities for subjective articulations. To "read" subjects (though the term is construed negatively by the queens in *Paris*, for contextually different reasons) offers provisional intelligibility, discursive existence. Butler explains that 'a performative "works" to the extent that it *draws on and covers over* the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilised' (227). If intervening in those conventions involves uncovering the performativity – the drawing on conventions for its momentary performative effect – then "reading" is insulting for the ball queens for the same reason it is in other contexts potentially subversive of those norms. In Butler's reading of *Paris is Burning*, the subversive function of drag is limited

to the extent that it reflects the mundane impersonations by which heterosexually ideal genders are performed and naturalized and undermines their power by virtue of effecting that exposure. But there is no guarantee that exposing the naturalized status of heterosexuality will lead to its subversion.(231)

Her example of drag's failure to subvert is when it reidealises heterosexual norms without questioning them. Subversiveness needs to be "read" as such.

As Butler has noted, the context of signification lies beyond the reach of the performative speech acts which declare their own autonomy. Their effect is only ever apparent within a broader frame which is both given and banished from view in the moment of the speech act. In its most generalised conception the framing consists of the reading conventions which govern meaning. Though there is no subject, no first person pronoun, which preexists signification, there are codes and systems which govern the intelligibility of the subject's entrance into signification via the pronoun. In *Gender Trouble* Butler calls them 'the rules that regulate the legitimate and illegitimate invocation of that pronoun, the practices that establish the terms of intelligibility by

which that pronoun can circulate' (143). That seems to me to be the current complexion of subjective representation. The "accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force" that enables performativity may well appear global in its reach, but it is specific in its executions. Wary now, and weary, of metanarratives that promise theorised solutions to complex and broad-reaching questions, we are better placed to attend to practices in which we are complicit: to negotiate, with greater consciousness of the minutiae, the experiential force with which our own subjective formations and practices enable and disable the reception and intelligibility of subjective difference.

Textual practice supports the legal, medical, heterosexual technologies of selves. *Eligibility* is homonymously incorporated into *intelligibility*, *rights* are established through *recognition*. Just as textual practices render recognition and rights, transformative agency must enjoin reading practices rather than traffic in subject positions. The alignment of subjective agency to classified (sexed, gendered, raced) bodies generates regulated subjects. Of course bodies interface with everyday experiences of materiality. Bodies are not inconsequential and for Butler, bodies matter. But the legal pettifogging about transgenderists demonstrates how grounding identities in bodies *logico ad absurdum* perpetrates its own violence. Int/elligibility requires constant negotiation, but negotiation presupposes some degree of mutual comprehension. The power to silence resides in the court's ability to withdraw unilaterally from dialogue, by refusing to confer a subject's standing.

The legal operation of standing enters into cultural circulation metaphorically. This does not imply a causal relation from the judiciary to popular consciousness, but simply situates its most egregiously dramatised and powerful performativity in the courtroom. The desire to negotiate the structural operations of standing, from *within*, is an unrealisable desire for reciprocity in a unilateral affair. No amount of self-avowal will construct an intelligible and thus empowered subject position if nobody is listening.

Butler considers the psychotic effect of breaking heterosexualising taboos, 'not only as the prospect of losing the status of a subject and, hence, of life within language, but as the terrorizing spectre of coming under an unbearable censor, a death sentence of sorts' (1993a: 98). Here psychosis is less an individual pathology, than the cultural effect of internalising the symbolic threat of punishment for refusing to assume a sanctioned, and thus intelligible, subject position. It is the psychic effect of being denied cultural standing.

CONCLUSION

Subjects of culture are most influentially legally and medically defined, psychically introjected and textually interpreted. The principle of standing underwrites the juridico-cultural imperative to have and to declare, and to have declared on your behalf, an identity. Nietzsche's assertion that God is dead but grammar remains, and Barthes' equivalent that the Author is dead and the reader is born, mark a horizon of possibility where the imperative for identity avowal diminishes. Nietzsche's textuality, and Barthes' reader have been instrumental to poststructuralism. The death of the Author might be at last sedimenting in our cultural imagination.²³ But that does not resolve the question of authorship once and for all. Rather, it allows for the recognition that authorship exists in high tension with its receptions. Mid to late twentieth-century technologies, such as television, advertising and the internet, have sped up the process of demystifying authorship. Now might be the time to think through the possibilities (and doubtless the exclusions) occasioned by the rediscovery of readership and reception.

Through analysis of *The Crying Game* and *Paris is Burning* I argue that narrative representation of transvestism, transsexualism, and gender-play more broadly, do not guarantee intelligibility of their referent. In *The Crying Game* a circular logic operated to maintain an oppositional conceptual frame against fantasies of difference. The indefatigability of the phallus metaphor (in the film and its receptions) results from a reading practice which in its quest to reproduce masculine subjectivity is mistaken for subjectivity *tout court*. This is a synecdochal practice which, blind to its own structure, cannot be "read". A practice which reintroduces uncertainty and provisionality, thematically and structurally, has greater claims against the sex/gender system. The bodily self-avowal of postoperative transgenderist subjectivity may add momentum to that process in one direction. But analysis of cultural and legal misrecognition of self-avowed "queers" complicates the terms by which the sex/gender system can be challenged. Following Butler, hyperbolic distortions of culturally "unread" terms make ripples in the texture of subjectivity; but an inattentive or wilful ignorance of the self-

²³ A moment of crisis in tertiary institutions in this country highlighted the competing material and intellectual tensions between authorship and authority. The ownership of academic research was being contested between academics and institutions, when the Australian Research Council was reported to have 'come down in favour of a liberal intellectual property model for universities – a model that in most cases assigns ownership back to the originator, not the university' (*The Australian Higher Education Supplement*, 1995: 21). This return of proprietary rights is an important victory over the growing privatisation and consonant economic, intellectual and ideological control institutions have over workers. This kind of contextual location of authorship provides the potential for understanding the conception of authorship as strategic, and in the sense that it is contestable, demystified. After all, the triumph here is precisely over the authority of institutions to regulate unilaterally all intellectual output via the economic rationalist and ill fitting conceit of productivity.

avowal can leave the queer subject without standing. In the context of subjectivity this equates to non-existence.

Subjectivity can be sourced neither exclusively within language systems, nor within regulating institutions of the public sphere, nor within internalised psychic registrations of selfhood. Subjectivity is a function of the circulations of action, meanings and volition between these spheres. This compels attention to the modes of circulation for any critique of the sex/gender system. I have shown how reading practices underwrite the intelligibility of subjects. Before turning in Section 2 to analysis of reception theory and to Woolf's textual practice in *Orlando*, I complete Section 1 by addressing the impulse to subject-object relationship that governs reading practices within the sex/gender system and restricts to oppositionality any freeplay with subjectivity. The shift from a subject-object to an intersubjective perspective forms the structure of argument in Section 2.

3 SADOMASOCHISM AND THE "SAFE" WORLD OF MASCULINE SUBJECTIVITY¹

when a subject is highly controversial – and any question about sex is that – one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold.

(Woolf, 1929: 4)

As a point of convergence for twentieth-century cultural critiques of subjectivity, pleasure is disputed territory. Influenced by discourses of psychoanalysis, "pleasure" is broadly understood as an effect of libido, or desire, and played out principally in the domain of sexuality. Pleasure can be located in any domain of activity – or inactivity – but its elemental impulse is conventionally taken to be sexual. Where pleasure has been prohibited, censured, policed or in other ways regulated culturally and historically, critical intention is to liberate pleasure from the regime that represses it. Thus, psychoanalysis set itself the task of "talking out" what is repressed in the unconscious; sexual identity politics articulate sexual identifications that have been refused intelligibility; "pro-sex" campaigners argue for unregulated pornographic representations, against the censorship of apparently "anti-sex" feminism and religious moralism; and s/m discourses set about liberating sexual games of dominance and subordination from the reproductive sexual ideology – the "vanilla" sex – of mainstream culture. The pressure from each of those liberationist agendas is more consistently applied to the discourses around practices, than to the context of any practices. What a practice of pleasure might *signify* has been of greater interest than apparent effects of such practices. Pleasure has come under critical scrutiny, that is to say, for what it might reveal about the desiring self.

¹ An earlier version of this chapter was published in 1994 under the title 'Transgression: the "safe" word in s/m discourses'. *Mattoid*, vol. 481: 241-53.

The task of self-defined subjectivity is a characteristic of modernity. Following Foucault's historiography of the subject, the individual (masculine subject) earlier vested by reference of others and by demonstration of allegiances, has come to be authorised by the discourse of truth "he" was willing or impelled to pronounce about "himself" (Foucault, 1976: 58-59). The confessional mode has become the *modus operandi* of Western epistemology. In the twentieth century a slide toward investigating the irrational – from surrealism to psychoanalysis – led to a renewed understanding of the self through desire. Insofar as desire is a function of what can be said about the self, the momentum for activism around issues of sexual freedom is borne through dialogue about desire.

The argument in this chapter works from the general principle of dialogue about desire to the particular relationship of talk and sex. Talk about sex is an organising element in the domains of psychoanalysis and sadomasochism (s/m). Each implicitly a radical "cure" for the other, psychoanalysis and s/m are linked by the tension of their apparent oppositeness. Here I work from the conceptual convergence of psychoanalysis and s/m around the use of language – or sign systems – to define and delimit libido. Conventionally, in neither context is a cigar just a cigar; an uttered "no" suggestive wholly of refusal. Psychoanalysis and s/m speak with power: psychoanalysis with the power of academic and historical standing; s/m with, the power of "authenticity" attributed by its self-consciously subcultural status and its radical sexual focus. Both speak with power about sexed and gendered subjectivity, and function as domains of truth in the matter.

The first part of this chapter disputes claims that s/m represents a radical challenge to the sex/gender system, and situates s/m within a long history of corporal punishment in the establishment of sovereignty over subjects. The second part contextualises the interplay of truth and sex within receptions of Sade and the modern history of the masculine subject, examining the persistent negotiations of sexed subjects with discourses of psychoanalysis.

1 SEXUAL OUTLAWS

Whereas talk represents the beginning of the psychoanalytic process, it can represent the end of the s/m process, where a "safe" word is uttered to limit the play. The role of the "safe" word in s/m practices provides a conceptually logical point of entry into consideration of s/m. I interpret s/m as an instance (of sex radicalism) within a larger field of enquiry. In this chapter I complete my analysis of the organising assumptions

and limits of counter-cultural practices, which are too often received optimistically in cultural critique as successfully productive of radical – or queer – subjectivities; and whose existence threatens to unmask the ineluctability of the oppositional sex/gender system. Here I begin with the “safe” word in s/m, working from its internal limits in order to discern the reach of its radicalism. There are no doubt forms of s/m and contexts for its practice that exceed my analysis. I focus on the relations that structure the poles of sex and gender, within what I consider conventional discourses of s/m, represented in a North American collection of s/m discourses, *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics and Practice* (Thompson, ed., 1991). In particular I address the subject-object relation invoked in the theatrically oppositional and engendered roles within s/m play.

1.1 Censorship

Debates around pleasure easily polarise around pro- and anti-censorship. I distinguish my analysis from that oppositional reflex. It is one thing to liberate representation of sexual practices from the repressiveness of Victorian moralism. It is another to regard all sex radical practices as *ipso facto* progressive for the purposes of deconstructing gender dimorphism. S/m has been received as a site of transgressive subcultural practice and radical identification.² Whatever the subjective experiences available within s/m practices, the representations of gender that enable roles to be played out are drawn from the same cultural archives that produce gendered subjects for “vanilla” sexuality. The reception of sex radicalism as transgressive of mainstream sex (and thus gender) imperatives belongs to the tradition of sexual liberation most prominent in the 1960s. An apt example of that tradition’s gendered unconscious is the trial of D. H. Lawrence’s notorious *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. The text famously expresses fear and hatred of lesbians, “modern” women who were sexually self-determined and psychically independent of men; women who “grind their own coffee”, in the euphemism of the text. It clearly demarcates passive feminine and active masculine roles in sexuality. The text expresses much else besides, but the focus of its trial in the 1960s was its sexual content and the matter of its censorship. For a text that dramatises masculine sexual expression at the expense of the feminine, it is a palpable irony that the text’s victorious advocates were held to have acted on the principle of sexual liberation. Arguably the activism of fighting censorship is an altogether different politic from the work of critiquing gender dimorphism. Nonetheless those two forms cross over many cultural issues, and s/m is an obvious example. In a broader cultural

² Examples include lesbian debates about s/m, commentary on the Hellfire (s/m) club in Melbourne, and the longterm reception of Sade as an exemplar of sexual radicalism, all of which are discussed further along. The subtitle of *Leatherfolk (radical sex, people, politics and practice)* explicitly draws from this construction of s/m as a platform for its politics.

context where sexual activity is still primarily held to be constitutive of masculinity, and passivity of femininity – and where sexual violence mediates the two in much of our cultural consciousness – representations of s/m cannot plausibly be understood to deconstruct those old inequities. To defend representations of s/m against censorship makes sense. To defend representations of s/m as subversive of gender dimorphism, however, is not tenable in the face of its current formations. Why representations of s/m require defence at all is to do with their contexts.

The nationalist fanaticism and physical violence that mobilised Nazism and Fascism is typical material for s/m club theme nights. When in the early 1990s the Hellfire Club, an s/m venue in Melbourne, advertised its Nazi uniform night, public pressure against the club compelled the owners of the building that was leased to the Hellfire operators to issue a public apology. In the clash of marginalities – s/m discourse and politicised Judaism – the issue turned on the trite oppositioning of parody and fundamentalism. Were s/m practitioners parodying the repressed sexual nature of authority? Were the critics of the nazi theme literalists who were unable to unmoor a sign (the swastika) from its origins, or were they accurately identifying fascist impulses, under the guise of private pleasures, emerging in the inner urban s/m subculture? Those terms might have framed the conflict, but are they the right questions?

Pat Califia, a contributor to *Leatherfolk*, and a prolific writer in defence of s/m, has used this argument in a different context to support claims that s/m represents a radical resistance to authority. Alex Kershaw cites Califia as an authority on s/m's radicalism in his article, 'Love Hurts', regarding consensual s/m activities between sixteen men in the UK that resulted in near fatal lacerations to their bodies. Kershaw writes in support of the men as their appeal against the conviction is pending. He cites Califia's apologist advocacy for s/m.

There's an enormous hard-on beneath the priest's robe, the cop's uniform, the president's business suit, the soldier's khakis...but that phallus is powerful only as long as it is concealed, elevated to the level of a symbol, never exposed or used in literal fucking. In an S&M context, the uniforms and roles and dialogue become a parody of authority, a challenge to it, a recognition of its secret sexual nature. (Kershaw, 1992: 7)

In this rhetorical demystification of power Califia automatically links power to masculinity through a literal interpretation of a penis as a phallus. If biology and cultural authority slide into one another deterministically in the real and the parodic

representations of power then it is difficult to imagine s/m as anything other than complicit in those relations

1.2 *Leatherfolk* and Outlaws

There are twenty-five authors included in *Leatherfolk*, and the discontinuities between their texts testify to the diversity of voices speaking under the rubric "s/m". Nevertheless consistent to all of these pieces is the assertion that s/m is transgressive: of nature, of culture, of materiality, of discourse, of law – its "outlaw" status being the overarching claim for its transgressiveness. As there can be no transgression without limits to transgress, the formation of subjectivity in s/m is enabled by the definition of limits. The most defined limit is the "safe" word, described by Truscott in *Leatherfolk* as:

a term agreed to by both partners to be used in an emergency during S/M play. It is chosen to be different from any word likely to be used in the context of the scene (where partners might appropriately choose to ignore "No!" or "Stop!"), so that the safe word's use immediately calls attention to the problem. (Thompson, ed., 1991: 19)

The convention of the safe word raises questions about the type of radicality that can be enacted in an s/m context. What can it mean for s/m play that its limits are marked by a word that signifies nothing in itself – that is defamiliarised for the context; that a speech act is a necessary and sufficient condition to stop the "radicalism" from exceeding itself? What can it mean that unintelligibility – a word that means nothing beyond its function to produce closure – marks the limit of s/m play? Unintelligibility marks the edges of reason and the limits of subjectivity. This is a crucial factor in my critique of s/m discourses' claims to transgression and it mobilises my argument that the subject formation in s/m discourses is necessarily masculine.

A characteristic construal of s/m is of a marginal practice representative of sexually free and radical subjectivity that critiques the brutality of the repressive dominant discourses. In *Leatherfolk*, editor Mark Thompson lines up s/m and gay masculine identity with the popular cultural outlaw tradition:

Marlon Brando in *The Wild One* might have been the first rebel on a bike to roar into the American psyche, but it was the gay leathermen of the time who really cut the archetypal mold of sexual outlaw. (1991: xv)

The specifically masculine cast of this subjective identification is echoed by John Preston, a contributor to *Leatherfolk* who urges the integration of 'the essential, often frightening, exciting edges of our sexuality and our spirituality ... with the search for authentic masculinity' (Thompson, ed., 1991: 220). The Death of the Author represents the decline of traditional symbolic indices of masculine power. If the decline of Sovereignty as an unassailable truth of social governance has been a long drawn out process, its introjected form – the internalisation of absolute power – has its own sorry narrative of struggle and loss. S/m discourses tell the story of the problem for masculinity of the decline of patriarchal symbolism. As the concept of masculinity – gender differentiation – is central to patrilineal interests in an economy of reproductive sexuality, the decline of patriarchy signals the irrelevance of gender. S/m represents a particular response to the problem of the Absolute for the ritual of subjective self-determination. In s/m discourses the concept of the Absolute represents the unbounded realm of desire and the projection of the irreducibility of gender. S/m declares its outlaw status through external projection of the power inequities that structure its meaning.

Leatherfolk, looking at the brutal acts of dominance and submission that are carried out in America everyday, know that in such rapacious and nonconsensual acts lie the real sadomasochism that plagues our time. In our audacious explicating of society's roles and violent tensions, leatherfolk mirror the deadly games that a culture dishonest with itself plays. (Thompson, ed., 1991: xi)

Thompson's analysis presupposes an alignment of brutality with eroticism. If the rapacity and nonconsensuality of brutal acts in everyday America need to be faced by (mirrored to) a "dishonest" culture, how does eroticism come to figure in the process? How can s/m be "other" than everyday America if the role it plays is a kind of psychodrama? If it is not "other", then it is complicit in the dishonesty and brutal acts that it mirrors. Thompson's logic here is reversible. The issue is not the undeniable injustices and violence of "everyday" modern nations such as America but, more explicitly, the structural affinity between sadomasochistic subject-object relations and the tyrannical laws against which their discourses are made intelligible.

1.3 S/m and Corporal Punishment

S/m has a long historic link with aristocracy and oppressive religious regimes. An examination of a cultural history of corporal punishment makes a case for situating

intensified representations of s/m within contexts of political tyranny or change.³ The Marquis de Sade has become the very figure of sex radicalism, as much through his literary production as through his sex crimes. His satires of Christianity and the State aroused the wrath of the Church and Napoleon, and he was jailed for his critical stance. The interrelations of sex, religion and politics in the period leading up to the French Revolution constituted the conditions for his notoriety. The context for Sacher-Masoch, whose name provides sadism's corollary, masochism, was the Polish Revolution.

The libidinal energy required for revolution forms the basis for the thesis in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1972) classic critique of psychoanalysis, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. The text obliquely responds to Wilhelm Reich's earlier question about what led people to desire their own repression under fascism. Reich's questioning of group masochism made the radical allowance that people were not simply duped by fascism but acted from desire in supporting its reign. Deleuze and Guattari blame the myth and interpretations of Oedipus for the internalisation of restraints on desire that lead people to seek their own submission. Contrary to psychoanalysis, they construe fantasy as a collective rather than private matter. They argue that the structure of desire according to the collective neurotic fantasy of the oedipal family reduces libido to a "dirty little secret" of triangulated family romance and reproduction (22-36).

For Deleuze and Guattari sexuality is not a private familial impulse but part of the streams of energetic flow that cannot be divided into public and private spheres; they describe it in Reichian terms as a kind of "cosmic energy" (292). They consider equally important the social investments in "desiring-production" and the investments of desire in "social-production". Where psychoanalysis has the libido restricted and desexualised in its social function, Deleuze and Guattari argue that on the contrary, restriction is in force when the libido is structured as specifically oedipally sexual. Freud's anthropomorphic and essentially gendered representation of sex rendered it unequal and always-already castrated (295). Free from interpretations and introjections of gendered and castrated sexuality, the libido is the force that energises revolution, enabling a collective people to produce change and overturn tyranny. Depending on the regimes through which we identify, libido can work equally to support tyranny:

³ The following analysis draws on Scott (1996), first published under the title *Flagellation* in the politically vivid year of 1968.

The truth is that sexuality is everywhere: the way a bureaucrat fondles his records, a judge administers justice, a businessman causes money to circulate ... Hitler got the fascists sexually aroused. Flags, nations, armies, banks get a lot of people aroused.
(293)

Against psychoanalysis Deleuze and Guattari offer schizoanalysis, a nonfigurative analysis of the unconscious outside the neuroticising control of oedipal narratives; a political unconscious that includes the social without enforcing the dogma of subjectivity (379-81). Immanent rather than transcendent, the "schizo" has bypassed the ego-formations of oedipal narratives, has refused the "goals" of attaining subjectivity thereby evading the "cruelty" of the inherited symbolic (145). In his preface to the text Foucault suggests jokingly that it could be used as a manual for every-day non-fascist living. He sees in *Anti-Oedipus* seven essential principles by which one could choose to live well. The last of these is "do not become enamoured of power" (xiv). Though critics who argue for the radical possibilities of s/m could draw support from Deleuze and Guattari on the basis of the text's impulse against the neurotic formation of the oedipal family subject, I extend their critique of the oedipality of subject-object relations to the subject in formation within the rehearsals of dominance and submission in s/m.

If libidinal energy can generate revolution then the emergence of s/m at such heightened historical moments can be seen as a representation of ambivalence in the face of impending social change. Both Sade and Sacher-Masoch were aristocrats living at the edge of massive social upheaval. The collective fantasies produced in their eroticisation of dominance and submission may be understood to represent a desire for liberation from, and fear of loss of, the symbolism of absolute authority.

The ancient and sovereign exercise of corporal punishment as a means to subordinate subjects is well documented. Well before Roland Barthes' optimistic birth of the reader, the symbolic rebirth of the author was reiterated in public scenes of corporal punishment. The Old Testament catalogues acts of cruelty as effective punishment. Whipping was generally used for many criminal and political offenders, but it is specifically mentioned as a punishment for 'betrothed women guilty of sexual misdemeanour' (Scott, 1996: 38). The Old Testament scripted the judaeo-christian relationship of naming to patriarchal sovereignty, most expressly in the Creation and Adam and Eve myths. The selfhood conferred by patrilineal naming is most vulnerable in its dependence on the authenticity of the link between the name and that named. Marriage and women's chastity have been the traditional means for establishing this

continuity. The punishment for betrothed women, above, marks a clear emphasis on patriarchal fear and control of women's sexuality through physical cruelty.

In the ancient monasteries the tradition of flagellation for misdeeds had been well digested and the practice was widespread. New recruits to religious orders were advised to seek atonement through self-flagellation. The power of God was synonymous with the power of the Church, and through this authority the custom of 'voluntary submission to pain or suffering or humiliation, as a means of expiation for a sin of transgression committed against God or the Church' was entrenched (Scott, 1996: 99). Self-punishment falls in line with the ancient practice of sacrifice; and, for renunciates who were dependent on a community for food and medicines, such sacrifice was the mark of the authenticity of the faithful. Clearly the relationship between sexual desire and self-flagellation is less causal than circular, and the ambiguity between religious and sexual ecstasy is graphically represented in Bellini's sculpture, the Ecstasy of Saint Theresa. Saints' reputation were established by such practices. St Pacificus, named in ironic repudiation of his preference for flagellation, was said to torture himself with such enthusiasm 'as to fill all those with horror who heard the whirlings of the lash or saw the abundance of blood which he had shed during the flagellation' (cited in Scott, 1996: 100). The apogee of religious cruelty was uncontestedly reached by the Holy Inquisition across its five hundred years of persecution for the honour of the Catholic Church. The Inquisition was first established as a Court of Justice in Toulouse at the instigation of Pope Innocent III, whose name was surely an advertisement for the effectiveness of flagellation in achieving atonement. The Inquisition was an instrument enabling the Church to assume the authority of monarchy to try heretics – those who failed to reiterate the authority of the Church. On the slightest of pretexts people were tried as heretics and whipped through the streets of towns across Europe. One woman was tried as a heretic for purportedly saying: 'I do not know whether the Pope is a man or a woman, and I hear wonderful things of him every day, and I do imagine he must be an animal very rare' (121). For this, admittedly strange, speculation on the Pope she was whipped to death. The most notorious version of the Court of Justice was the Spanish Inquisition. Records kept by the council itself cite that 341,021 people were burnt at the stake or tortured from 1481-1808 (121). This works out to about three per day for 327 years. The strategy of using corporal punishment as a public spectacle enjoyed a success, of sorts, and Roman Catholicism flourished throughout Europe during the years of the Inquisition.

The pervasive power of Church dogma and belief, yoked to the power of God, explains how it was that kings and nobles fell to self-flagellation with the ardour of their subjects. Moreover, if atonement could be wrought through flagellation then acts of any kind could be carried out by royalty, and atoned for retrospectively, and, on occasion, vicariously. This was evidently the understanding of Henry IV of France who saw a loophole in the pervasive dogma of sin and atonement. After his excommunication he was ordered to submit to flagellation to procure atonement. In response he instituted the system of vicarious punishment and hired two of his ambassadors to share the strokes on his behalf. Soon afterward the two ambassadors rose to the rank of cardinal (Scott, 1996: 107). To exercise authority over subjects requires an adherence to the codes of authority and to the real effects of its power. A most palpable test of this adherence was the public witnessing of the spectacle of power over others in the form of corporal punishment. As the cardinals well knew, the price to pay for sovereignty is, paradoxically, not freedom from but submission to the effects of its power. Corporal punishment has been imposed by state institutions for centuries avowedly to regulate sexuality, religious practice, crime, illness and education. Each of these discursive domains has had investments in delimiting the boundaries of sovereignty and selfhood. Indeed, a history of the punishment of bodies as a reiteration of authority, is also a history of the inscription of subjectivity as an effect of hierarchised subject-object relations. In the current context s/m identities frequently reproduce the historic codes of subject-object relations – master-slave, religious-penitent, master-schoolboy, mistress-housemaid – with a kind of willed amnesia.

An important distinction between the cruelty of regulatory cultural regimes and the role-playing games of s/m turns on the question of consent. Like the issue of censorship, however, this can short circuit analyses of the meaning-effects of discourses of s/m. Scott cites administrators of corporal punishment, and witnesses, who say that the infliction of pain becomes increasingly severe when it becomes increasingly familiar (29) and that, through repetition, floggings were seen less as acts of cruelty and increasingly as entertainment (30, 88). The exercise of sovereign authority and the spectacle of entertainment are never wholly distinct domains. I conceptually link s/m and corporal punishment to rethink, beyond the pro- and anti-censorship deadlock, the codings of sexual representation. From this perspective s/m can be seen not as a private expression of sexuality free from social effect, but as a vivid example of how cultural discourses of “sex” exact their sovereignty through writing the script for the internalisation of sexual experience.

S/m is more readably a transformation into pleasure of the painful introjection of gender and sexual identification under threat of punishment. Discourses of s/m participate in sovereign history of corporal punishment to the extent that they structure the desire and product of masculine subjectivity through the sexual dramatisation of subject-object relations. S/m practices (generically comprising interactions of power inequity, humiliation, violence and pain) are situated intelligibly within the lineage of Christian and patriarchal programmes to sustain absolute authority through the spectacle of violence. If for some practitioners s/m constitutes an experience of self-determination, this personalised ritual does not reach to a public rearticulation of gender. In its repetition of the link between physical violence and sexuality it is more an avowal of patriarchal power relations than a transgression of them, and an active support for culturally dominant delusions of gender.

2 TRUTH AND SEX

The 'interplay of truth and sex' is, according to Foucault, a nineteenth-century bequest still impacting on twentieth-century thought (Foucault, 1976: 57). The notion that sex provides access to the secret truth and wholeness of the subject is certainly there in the assertions of *Leatherfolk*:

In an s/m scene, I know that I am safe from harm while being carried off to a different dimension – and when I get *there*, I get *real*.

Tina Portello, in Thompson (ed., 1991: 55)

What really burns me about all these criticisms of s/m is that people are trying to tell me how to live my sexuality. I have it that a person's sexuality is a private affair.

Carol Truscott, in Thompson (ed., 1991: 35)

As many leatherfolk well understand, rather than keeping parts of the psyche distant and detached, S/M can serve deep spiritual needs for wholeness and completion.

Mark Thompson (ed., 1991: xvii)

These expressions give voice to the persistent link between truth and sex. Lacan has theorised these connections in relation to Sade, yet here I work closely with Dean for her extension of Lacan's Sadeian analyses to the larger discursive field of gender theory.

Dean historicises s/m alongside the rise of the modern subject. Her argument intersects with mine in its exploration of the interconnectedness of discourses of desire and the law, and of the outlaw posturing of the desiring masculine modernist subject. In her analysis of how the intellectual history of France generated the poststructuralist critique of humanism and of "man" as a rational subject, Dean explains the significance for twentieth-century subjectivity that Sade came to represent the truth of sex (1992: 135). According to a specific set of nationalist imperatives Sade went from being interpreted as a monster of perversion by nineteenth-century writers to, in interwar France, a humanitarian victim of vicious women, the Revolution and moral narrow-mindedness (150). Dean looks at 'how female deviance came to symbolize a crisis of male authority which began in the late nineteenth century and crystallised after 1918' and how the response by psychiatrists and psychoanalysts to this deviance was to reshape notions of the masculine self as other (58). In the French medical and psychoanalytic enterprise to discern the mechanisms involved in unmotivated crime, doctors understood the immediate criminal threat to the social order in terms of gender, and specifically in terms of nonconformist, "deviant" women' (58). Depopulation was linked to feminism, which was responsible for women's refusal of their designated social roles. The defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian war in 1870 was linked to a declining birth rate (a symptom of French malaise) and national decline and moral decadence had been associated by cultural critics with female deviance (58-59). Women's bodies were increasingly regulated to remedy the sluggish birth rate and laws were passed forbidding the distribution of contraceptives and information about them (59). The rising misogyny expressed a male fantasy of female power, linking it to cultural decay. 'Medical men equated female sexuality with female power and used the pseudoscientific construction of sexual difference as a pretext for both identifying and controlling it' (60).

Against this background of interest in deviance and its relation to gendered subjectivity, Sade came to figure for the specificity of sexual violence in his real and apparent crimes. In their unacknowledged drive to identify and control sexual difference, some of Sade's contemporaries saw in his violent sexuality an essential masculinity against which to define women. Some defended his sadistic sexual fantasies as natural in men and perverted only when manifest in women, defended sexual violence as the central component of heterosexual relations, and defined the respective roles for women and men in sex as masochist and sadist. The women who brought charges against Sade were ridiculed by his defenders and his avowed hatred of women was justified by reference to his arranged marriage (Dean, 1992: 131). This version of Sade was a reaction against earlier construals of him as a madman, and a reconceptualisation of

him as a matter of nationalistic pride. When Iwan Bloch considered Sade's writings a mirror of the depraved morals of late eighteenth-century France, French patriots took offence, arguing that it was not the French but the Germans who were most characterised by sadism (128). The newer reception of Sade as a victim of a moral and legal system that punished non-procreative sexual pleasure 'symbolized and shaped the new concept of the self as an irretrievable other'. This reconstruction of Sade mirrored anxieties about the dissolution of boundaries (self-other, normal-pathological). The dissolution of the self was defined in terms of the interrelation of the self and sadomasochism. From the newer reception of Sade as a victim developed the notion of him as wanting to be a victim. Arguments in defence of sadism were reacting against religious moralism, and were cast in terms of the pursuit of Reason; to replace the mystery of sex with the truth of sex (132) according to a psychiatrist in the 1930s in his work on perversion. This work was part of the altering perception of sexual "perverts" as criminal recidivists (and thus subject to the court and prison systems) to the emphasis on rehabilitation, and an increasingly medical definition of boundaries.

Medicine at this time was increasingly obsessed with the determination of sex. According to Dean this obsession was a response to 'the blurring of sexual boundaries – of masculinity and femininity and of normality and pathology – effected at the end of the nineteenth century and exacerbated by the war' (1992: 134). Sexuality was no longer understood to mirror instinct but was taken to be the effect of the correspondence between sex (instinct) and gender. 'This correspondence they wanted regulated appropriately' (135 n 28). Just as science sought the meaning and essence of sexuality, medical biographers of Sade sought the real Sade, whose desire 'in its obsessiveness, its variety, and its cruelty' was symbolic of sexual truth (135). Analysts revered Sade for expressing the sexually violent desires that most men purportedly conceal under a veil of bourgeois hypocrisy (131). The apparently normative link made by these men between violence and sex (and selfhood) is suggestive of the culturally reinforced mechanism of subject-object relations that structure masculine identification. This makes clearer the need to polarise the genders around sadism so that it is for men a normal aspect of sexuality and pathological only when manifested by a woman (138). As a defining structure of masculinity it had to be unnatural in a woman. It was moreover, understood insofar as it was directed specifically toward women: there was no sustained analysis of the homosexuality represented in Sade's sadism. The women asserting Sade's criminality were rescripted as whores, liars, masochists and so on (152) and in this way his critics exonerated Sade of his crimes and read him for his literary production not for his actions.

Sade thus spoke, as a prophet, of the criminal in Everyman. In the context of his indefinite incarceration he was conditioned as a martyr to his truth. 'Sade's sadomasochism represented the ecstatic self-dissolution characteristic of martyrdom, especially as conceived in a century that envisioned itself as undergoing painful moral deterioration' (Dean, 1992: 154). As a new "religion" born in the wake of the corruption of older institutional forms, 'Sadism (and instinct itself) was reinterpreted as a kind of male spirituality that bursts forth as a healthy, powerful, even revolutionary force' (160). Andre Breton declared Sade 'the most authentic precursor to Freud and all of modern psychopathology', and the Surrealists used Sade as 'an emblem of the affirmative force of the libido and as a tragic symbol of the power of censors and of bourgeois defenders of the state and the family in particular' (160).

This mythologizing of Sade by the surrealists and many others thus came close to the nineteenth-century myth of true love and self-sacrifice, the idea that love was inevitably bound up with self-annihilation, but it also, of course, as with all martyrs, led to immortality. Sade's writing was the product of a selflessness, of a self-sacrifice, that revealed humanity to itself; Sade, in other words, died for our sins. (168)

Turned into a Romantic and religious hero, Sade represents the quest structured through a fierce belief in the subject-object mechanism for the acquisition of masculine identity. The focus on Sade as a writer foremost (as distinct from a sadist or criminal) exonerated his reputation: his works were 'the literary vengeance of a man whose life had been brutally stolen from him, as the perfectly rational reaction of a man powerless before the successive regimes that saw fit to censor his desire' (167). Masculine identity – as outlaw – in this formulation remains vestigially phallic, still seeking its identification through its relationship to power. One of his apologists describes him as 'so radically male that he can find no other relationship to God or to women, to morality or to the world, than a cynical one' (168).

If the surrealists saw Sade's writing as an expression of his free and radical spirit, and a result of his incarceration and censorship, later receptions by Bataille and Lacan understood his writing as a compulsion too. From their perspectives Sade's writing was compelled not by his incarceration but by his "secret". Bataille described the relation of the surrealists to Sade as one of primitive subjects to their king (Dean, 1992: 173). He established with others a secret society – *Ácephale* (headless) – conceived as a rejection of the established church. *Ácephale* was a church without God (hence, headless). In an act of criticism of utilitarian social structures – communism, capitalism – this group sought the renewal of the subject through allegiance to the

model of the "tragic man", as Bataille saw it, an identification premised on resistance (171-72). Their reception of Sade reinvented him as a tragic figure who lives the knowledge of the impossibility of living plenitude, of quenching desire, of becoming real. One of *Ácephale*'s members, Klossowski, saw Sade's challenge to the phallic law/God as an inevitable failure that results in a profound longing for authority (174), motivated by fear of the absence of absolute authority.

Conditioned by the Death of God, Sade's subjectivity came to stand for the new self: an absolute ego-self forged in the solitude of thirteen years of incarceration representing a fitful and vain belief that the self can be found once-and-for-all in the libido. Sade's violence was welcomed as the exposed underbelly of Enlightenment rationalism; the secret violence that underlies and oversees the institutions and categories of rationalism and reason, and thus, of the symbolic forms through which the self is articulated. Unable to renounce the symbolically authorising mechanisms of the concept of God, the revolt takes the form of sacrilege. 'It is thus precisely because the libertine values God that he revolts'. Not a rejection of the tyranny of the God-concept, but a belief in it and a desire for it to manifest (in the cruelty of the world) is what motivates his hatred, 'his revolt is in fact a quest for divine love which is a reaffirmation of God's power' (Dean, 1992: 176). Sade's writing elucidates the relationship to power of a masculine subject-in-form, when the traditional mechanisms of (symbolically masculine) authority and lineage are in decline. 'The libertine thus addresses a perpetual reproach to God destined to remain without a response'. Without response the subject is not intelligible.

The revolt is also a setup: a refusal of the fact that any response from the Absolute inevitably results in the libertine's loss of self, diminished in the context of Absoluteness. The rage is sourced from the paradox that the only way to attain full selfhood is by relinquishing the fantasy of absolute self-sovereignty: the libertine has to give up his power to attain his subjectivity; to situate his self within, not transcendent of, the authorising lineage. The compulsion in this context is to endlessly repeat the structures through which the subject is dramatised as masterful. 'Because the libertine, in Sade most often acting as a sadist, requires evidence of others' misery in order to feel pleasure in his own fortune, he is dependent on others for his status as master' (Dean, 1992: 176). The annihilation of the other – of his mirror – would ensure his own annihilation, so instead the drama is repeated of the subject-object relations by which the masculine self comes into intelligibility-as-mastery. This is why in Sade's writings, irrespective of the sex or gender of the "libertine" the symbolism is masculine (176). Moreover, the symbolic shift of origin from God to nature holds out the

impossible prospect for the masculine subject to identify with the feminine (nature). The Sadeian subject is situated at a transitional point. It has rejected the impossibly false maternal promise of plenitude and abandoned identification with the mother in favour of identification with the father. Caught between false promises and absence the subject enacts the drama through an experience of desire as cruelty. Whereas for surrealists Sade's fantasies had signified a drive to liberation, a will to pleasure, for Bataille they signified a drive to mastery (178). Sade's refusal of "headlessness" (the absent God) drives his quest for absolute mastery.

After the war the reception of Sade, as the figure of truth about subjectivity and civilisation, shifted. Stress on the psychological and metaphysical yielded to examinations of Sade's writing as textual effect. 'After Auschwitz' was the phrase that came to stand in for the apex of cruelty realised in modern history. Raymond Queneau in 1945 acknowledged that whether or not Sade was himself 'a terrorist' (not, from Queneau's perspective), after Auschwitz, ideas can no longer naively be taken as separate from the contexts in which they find expression. It was crucial to deal with 'the reality of the concentration camps, with their horrors no longer located in the mind of a man but practiced by thousands of fanatics. Mass graves are the logical conclusion of philosophies' (Dean, 1992: 184). After Auschwitz the focus shifted from the "tragic psyche" to the lived effects of that state. Sade's writing was now seen as a metaphor for an always-deferred mastery because writing always forecloses. Writing is governed and limited by rules and cannot reach beyond consciousness to the Absolute. Sade's writings allow him (and his readers) to live his desire for absolute mastery (186-87).

Bataille saw Sade's secret as the secret that civilisation keeps from itself about the violence that underpins its functioning (Dean, 1992: 187). Violence that advances the interests of the state – war, capital punishment, incarceration, medical intervention – is never declared as such, but is reconstituted as lawful. Sade's work, following Bataille, insists that 'violence structures all our political and social institutions' so Sade's language is that of the victim, not the executioner, because it names injustice and cannot keep it silent. Clearly Bataille is reluctant to analyse the relationship between "naming" injustice through compulsive repetition of it, and the perpetuation of the violence that constitutes such repetition. The relationship is evident even in the sense that Sade's naming of the violence that structures civilisation, in turn named him as the embodiment of sexual violence (sadism). Bataille's reluctance is necessarily gendered: the violence that Sade purportedly exposes, in the same vein that Thompson claims (above) to do, marks the characteristic of the subject-object dynamic through which masculine identity takes form. Violence is what perpetrates the myth of phallic law. In

other words the mythic power of patriarchal systems is achieved through violent repression of the feminine, psychically, symbolically and, inevitably, literally. This does not mean that men are violent and women are not; it means that the concept of masculinity (and after Auschwitz concepts exist in the world as much as in the minds of people) is intelligible only in its difference from the concept of femininity against which it makes sense, and without which it has no definition.

2.1 The Symbolic

The secret beneath the violence of patriarchy is its fear. The myth of the power of the maternal function (singled out for loathing by Sade) to delegitimise it is what threatens the intelligibility of the symbolic. The maternal is the corporeal line of transmission, mediating the relation between the infant (the signified) and its Father (signifier/Name). The Sadeian repetition of repression of the feminine fails repeatedly to reorder this structure and open the way for an unmediated relation between signifier and signified. Lacan saw Sade's incessant demands as a compensation for the loss of the "(m)other". His demands are for the (forever) lost object of desire called now by other names, other demands (Lacan, 1989: 65). He saw Sade's relationship to the law as the obverse of Kant's: whereas in Kant reason guides and guarantees the exercise of morality, in Sade it guarantees immorality (66). The relationship between desire, the law and patriarchy was not simply a feature of Sade's particular neuroses but an equation that upset his critics' own subjectivity. The question of paternity unites their quest. Most commentators have discussed Sade's reception in terms of law, paternity, violence, desire as the very equation of masculine identity. Indeed all the interpretive constructions of Sade (as criminal, writer, libertine) are made in reference to his gendered self. His criminality, as an example, is of interest only insofar as it clarifies the model of masculinity he implicitly offers.

The time of the Revolution, under whose regime Sade was tried as a moderate (his cruelty found inauthentic), might be taken as a national contestation of lineages from which the French had not yet recovered. Sade's commentators were not reconceptualising lineage itself but, rather, were engaged in the restoration of lineages through their analyses. The surrealists saw Sade as Freud's precursor, and by implication as Lacan's too. For Lacan, Sade's "naming" of desire in fact reinforced the law, and it was in this sense that Sade was kindred to Kant. For Lacan what designates the limits of Sade's sadism is its status as fantasy, which stops the inevitable annihilation that results when the right to jouissance becomes the law (Lacan, 1989: 62). In its repetition of laws (of the sexual violence that renders gender intelligible) sadism is a refusal to give up their power, to give up a relationship to those laws. Lacan

sees Sade as adhering unconsciously to oedipal law (65). For him Sade's drama of potency represents the 'senile tragic' (65), an actor in his own melodrama, not duped by his fantasy (65). Sade presents the predicament of a modern "man" in a world with no ground to stand on but inscribed by a law whose foundation can never be known.

The drama of Sade (criminal, writer, precursor to Freud) is the drama of what makes a modern man. In post-Renaissance modernity what makes a man is his quest to discover his (gendered) self and thus his relationship to law (oedipal, legal, literary, textual). If, in the myth of gender, femininity is transmitted corporeally from mother to daughter, masculinity has to be sought in the symbolic laws through which the Father is articulated. A man is he who follows the laws of masculinity. Bataille's version of Sade's subjectivity, the self-as-repression, is an attempt to create an authentic (masculine) self beyond symbolism, beyond the empty sign and failed promise of the phallus. Masculine resistance to the decline of patriarchy is recorded in these analyses. Bataille resolves his inability to relinquish his symbolic dependence on the power of the Father, by fantasising powerlessness as constitutive of this power. Decline becomes the condition of authority. 'If fatherhood therefore remained the fundamental condition of authorship, its authority no longer derived from a potent virility' (Dean, 1992: 197). In his construction of language as inevitably phallic, Lacan too participated in this critique and resurrection of patriarchy.

The practice of sadomasochism has no unified origin but is the product of two "authors", Sade and Sacher-Masoch. Its uncertain paternity names the quest of the practice, the search for the authorising father. It also invokes the fantasy of male-male generation unmediated by the feminine;⁴ and it bears in that tension between two names the hierarchical (sadist-masochist) or subject-object relations that structure the fantasy of masculine identification. Sade's drama is generated by his desire to *be* a man, his desire to be *intelligibly* a man, to be *read as* a man (as he was, by his followers). His compromise position is to be subject to the laws that render masculinity intelligible yet to rhetorically deny those laws. One "achieves" masculinity through the act of repressing those laws and is thus negatively defined by them as "man". This version of masculinity represents the continuity of the definition of the subject by reference of others. It is the opposite of self-determination.

⁴ For an elaborate analysis of the masculine desire to conceive from another man see Felman (1993), where in Chapter 4 she interprets Freud's founding dream of psychoanalysis (the dream of Irma) as a representation of this desire.

2.2 The Manufacturing of Consent

Where Lacan rhetorically departs from Sade is on the point of consent. Real mastery, for Lacan, is when victims consent to its laws (Lacan, 1989: 55). It is a question of consent and of psychological rather than material victory. Annihilation of the Other, this means, is not real mastery. Real mastery constitutes the subjugation of the will of the Other. The introjection of gender as the truth of the self exemplifies a form of cultural mastery over the self-determining individual subject. In s/m's consensual games of dominance and subordination – the agreement to dramatise the imposition of one sexual will (subject) over another's sexual will (object) – can be seen the psychosexual processes by which selves come into intelligibility: either as always-repressed or as subject-through-domination over others. S/m is the repetition of the inevitable failure of the ability to self-determine one's subjectivity under the structure of subject-object relations.

Gabrielle Antolovich raises this problem of consent as she contemplates her role as master, or "top", in an s/m scene:

Inside my own inner dungeon I asked myself 'What is their consent about anyway? What does their consent mean when all they've known is abusive relationships? With me at least they give permission. How can a person really consent when they think their role is to do everything they are told to do? (Thompson, ed., 1991: 252)

The confusion is interesting here: the issue of consent makes the subordination of the will "real" within the context of the game. To qualify as a real master she needs real control, but she finds the absoluteness of her own power equivocal. The slave's consent cannot be absolute when social relations have already worked on them and placed them within a hierarchy; consent and choice depend on each other. She connects the issue of will to broader social relations and doubts the validity of the s/m context for playing out the fantasy of subject-object relations. In her rhetorical questions can be heard the doubt that consent to the violence of an s/m scene is separate from the violence that influences that desire.

The relationship between mastery and consent has a parallel to the relationship between text and reception. The paradox of mastery is its dependence on the consent of its subjugated other to legitimise it. The legitimacy of a text is dependent in a similar way on its reception. A fantasy s/m scene related in *Leatherfolk* amplifies this pattern. In a narrative about fisting, 'The View from a Sling', Geoff Mains runs a parallel narrative about a scribe.

Sometimes, in the corner of my cell, a vague middle-aged man, shrivelled by maturity, takes notes in a clipboard pressed into his stylish white labcoat. Is he summarising the details of my life, preparing the registration and other papers for the hereafter? Sometimes I can will him away. Other times my thoughts have no effect. I no longer believe in the voice of reason, only the sound of the rain. (Thompson, ed., 1991: 233)

The overdetermined figure of the "scribe" conflates writer, scientist (lab coat), psychoanalyst (studying his subject) and prison warden (in his cell) – a visual metaphor for the authorities of delimitation which the narrator wants to transcend, and yet wants to be acknowledged as having transcended. 'Summarising the details' of his life, the "scribe" is crucial to the intelligibility of the narrator, and to his continuity, 'preparing ... for the hereafter'. The symbolic that the scribe represents cannot be given up, so he and the narrator are caught in the contrived subject-object dynamic, their wills interoperative: 'Sometimes I can will him away. Other times my thoughts have no effect'. The climax of the fantasy is expressed in Romantic terms. 'The scribe may write what he pleases, for I also write statements with my body, poetry with my soul.' The point of pleasure coincides with the establishment of an opposition between rationalism, 'the voice of reason', represented by the declining patriarch, 'a vague middle-aged man, shrivelled by maturity', and a Romantic privileging of nature in 'the sound of the rain'. The return to corporeal significance – the pre-symbolic, in psychoanalytic terms – where he writes statements with his body, is achieved significantly in the context of his submissiveness (object relation), as the "bottom" in the s/m scenario.

In the subject-object relations through which s/m play unfolds, the masculine identity that is in formation seeks to emerge against the Law-of-the-Father, or the Symbolic, and yet cannot be articulated without the sustenance of that Law. The shift from reason (cultural conferral of selfhood) to desire (self-conferral) as the source of subjectivity is reproduced in shorthand by the introduction of the safe word in an s/m play. The role of the man of reason is given up in favour of the role of the man constituted in and of desire. The difficulty for this newer identity formation is that whereas reason can rhetorically define its limits, desire, motivated by lack, is potentially without end, inexhaustible and without limit. The paradox for this newer psychic identity choice is that the masculine imperative to draw limits around itself – to mark off a separateness from the engulfing femininity, that latent legacy of maternal influence – cannot be met in the unbounded domain of desire.

The safe word represents the horizon of reason. It marks the zone where masculine subjectivity, formed in desire, is to be sealed off. It also adds the element of danger, an essential feature of masculine quest narrative. That masculine subjectivity is most starkly apparent in the context of sexual violence that constitutes s/m, reveals the mutual constitutiveness of violence and gender; that only under the threat of violence does gender difference enter the Symbolic in the Age of Reason. Gender difference is an effect of subject-object relations whereby one term is subordinated to the other. Marking the limit beyond which is unintelligibility, the "safe word" flags the arrival of masculine subjectivity at the edge of reason. To reach the point of uttering the safe word is to reach the point of subjective no-return. The subject-in-form in the domain of desire meets its boundaries. Without boundaries the subjectivity is not intelligibly masculine. To this end the subject produced in s/m never exceeds the laws of intelligibility – the Symbolic order – beyond which it fails to exist.

S/m dramatises the oscillation for masculine subjectivity between reason and desire. Formed in reason, the subject is not self-determined but enabled by laws that precede and script him, empowered by inheritance of the phallus. Formed in desire the subject has no boundaries and whatever self-determination might be experienced cannot be simultaneously known or articulated, for when it enters the symbolic it is constrained by the laws it was attempting to exceed. This problem for masculine subjective self-determination generated in the paradigmatic shift from the Age of Reason to modernity is famously narrated through the life and literary products of the Marquis de Sade. Moreover, the tension between self and other, subject and object, that subtends masculine subjectivity, is encoded in the ambivalently authored name of the practice.

2.3 Absolute Psychoanalysis

In England and in France it was not until the Second World War that psychoanalysis recovered from its marginalised status in the medical profession. It was applied in the treatment of victims of shell shock and its neurotic component (Dean, 1992: 33 n. 50). Questions of subjectivity for Bataille and for Lacan, influential figures in the intellectual critique of subjectivity, centre on the narrative of the son's relationship to the father. What drives their analyses is the recuperation of masculinity: whether the "Father" is real, authoritarian, virile, weak, imaginary, introjected, the phallus, external, the Law, Truth, in whatever carefully described distinctions, with whatever qualifications made to separate the conceptually distinct notions under analysis. The task can never be once-and-for-all complete: an interminable burden for masculinity under a patriarchal ordering of kinship. It is therefore crucial to contextualise the intellectual currencies we inherit (from, for example, French post-structuralist thought)

if we are to account for the persistence of gender-truth in discourses and practices of sexuality. What relation can there be between a French, neurotic search for masculinity and feminist, postfeminist, non-genderist analyses of the sex/gender system? While this question is not new to feminist debates around the uses of poststructuralist and psychoanalytic thought, it is not apparent that those models for subjectivity are free of the subtext of yearning for authoritative masculinity. Such a subtext sustains the delusory gendering processes by which selves attain subjecthood.

The psychoanalytic tradition is invested in sustaining the social order. Its mythologies of sexual difference reassert hierarchisation in the construction of meanings about sexual difference. The process of describing the psychic life that develops through the internalisation of the idea of that split, is organised around marking difference asymmetrically by the masculine sign of the penis/phallus. The foundational categories of psychoanalysis are not therefore *prior* to power relations but are the *effects* of those power relations. In this discourse of sex/uality and cultural power, identity is coded metaphorically by the phallus and metonymically by the penis. Psychoanalysis owes its existence to the power that discourse has to produce physical effects: to the power of language to materialise its signs; or, more practically, to the power that circulating discourses have over our subjectivity. Self-determination can begin with the process of analysing reception of such dominant discourses.

That psychoanalysis continues to empower cultural analyses has to do with the yearning for authority that those analyses enshrine: the authority of the critic enshrining the authority of masculinity (in that masculinity is always defined in some kind of relationship to the phallus, symbol of authority). Significantly, when Luce Irigaray produced a newer analysis of gendered subjectivity through which "woman" was not defined in terms of lack – as per the phallic order – but in terms of a more potent sexuality and difference, in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Lacan sacked her from the Department of Psychoanalysis at the University of Vincennes (see Whitford, 1991: 31). Masculine identity in those discourses is stuck in a phase of trying to work out the implications of the gulf between the lived experience of "men" and the historical fantasy of the masculine inheritance of authority. The lived experience of lack of authority – intensified with the internalisation of an *en masse* disempowerment of masculinity, after the Great War (another failure of an external guarantee to confer masculinity on its subjects) – provides the continuing basis for an insistence on the association between masculinity and authority. It is an equally available option for analysis to seek to disendorse the myth of masculinity-truth-authority and to free up subjectivity, to democratise its processes. The fact that it has chosen instead

predominantly to recuperate the relationship of masculinity and authority (the persistent logic of the phallus) suggests the cultural capital embedded in that link, and in the subject-object dynamic that gives it significance. The delusion of gender is a defence against the phobia of unintelligibility.

If s/m has not been well accommodated within discourses of gender, especially feminism, lesbian s/m in particular has been a site of feminist anxiety. In this chapter I have not entered into debates around whether or not lesbian s/m and feminism share common ground, or whether they even wish to. I have focused the argument instead at the level of the subject-object dynamic of subjectivity within s/m. As the larger argument across this thesis is for an intersubjective dynamic that subverts identity politics, I have had reason to avoid making a special case for lesbian s/m in this chapter. In the final section here I briefly address a reading of lesbian s/m to challenge its outlaw claims.

2.4 S/m and the Symbolic Mother

S/m is marked by a desire to read gender dimorphism against an absolute authority: to eroticise the fantasy that gender is safely policed by a symbolic Father (the Law) or Feminist Mother. In order to rethink the continuation of the "problem" of lesbian s/m for feminist analysis, Creet in 'Daughter of the Movement: the psychodynamics of lesbian s/m fantasy' characterises feminism as a Symbolic Mother and thus a locus of law. Following Lacanian psychoanalysis, however, she insists that this feminine-authored power is unenforceable. Lesbian s/m sustains a 'wish for an unambiguous authority that would relieve the guilt and desire of the s/m fantasy'; and the anger in s/m fantasies, such as those written by Pat Califia, 'is towards a Symbolic Mother who cannot deliver punishment, only guilt, and who will not recognize rivalry, only "sisterhood"' (Creet, 1991: 155). This formulation of lesbian s/m as a rebellion against the power of feminism takes for granted the feminine internalisation of "castration" – the feminine law as unenforceable – at the same time as it rages against the real effects of the power of feminism: the power to reproduce oedipal law through gendering its "daughters" but also the power to critique those laws, through resisting the gender truths reproduced in s/m. The rage against feminism that Creet suggests informs lesbian s/m fantasy represents the intergenerational struggle against being authored: the fight for self-determination. Yet Creet does not bother to account for why the rage to reauthor the self is not directed at the ground zero of authorship, the sex/gender system. The s/m she describes is a circular battle for self-determination that believes the "truth" of gender. In this way she has projected s/m fantasy as an intergenerational rebellion that reproduces what it pretended to dismantle; a kind of *bildungsroman* for the

liberated sexual individual. Her analysis has explanatory force in accounting for the sustained tension between feminism and lesbian s/m as a struggle for subjective self-determination. Where it falls short is in articulating why the struggle for self-determination is against "Mothers" for women/lesbians (and by inference, against Fathers for men). Insofar as her argument cannot account for but rather reinstates the separate subjective lineages of "men" and of "women", s/m emerges as a form of heterosocial reproduction. That is why when she asks 'what does it mean to rebel against [the] feminist Mother, to transgress her "repressive" law?', the answer is the same as it is to the question of surrealist "transgression" of psychoanalysis: it means reassertion of that law by a newly self-appointed subject of that law, the gendered self.

In arguments such as Creet's, s/m is readable not as a rejection of the gender system but as a resignation to its laws and belief that there is no alternative to them. Its desire is not to break those laws but to render them absolute. S/m play responds to the unpalatable social construction of gender by fantasising it as unnegotiably enforced by an absolute authority, and accepts the implicit compromises to self-determination in exchange for the imagined sovereignty of self, experienced in the intensity of physical sensation. In a culture where sex and truth and identity are mutually constitutive, s/m dramatises the cultural and intergenerational struggle to assume sexual/identity. S/m embodies in its scripting the tension between subjectivity and objectivity that must get resolved in one's own psychological favour in order to achieve separation and self-determination. Choosing to submit to the will of the "absolute", a concept informed by a cosmology of monotheism and imaginable through the structure of subject-object relations, relieves the anxiety of living out the uncertainty and incompleteness of any category of identification. S/m's rehearsal of the unnegotiable relation of gender to power relations is an attempt for the masculine subject to achieve a place of certainty within a well-established hierarchy. The cultural cost of this practice is the entrenchment of that set of relations.

CONCLUSION

In the broader argument of this thesis that gender identifications are delusory – and transgression of a delusion an impossibility – this chapter contends that far from transgressing the truths of gender dimorphism, s/m practices are most intelligible under the sign of masculine identification. Ritual formation of masculine subjectivity, made visible in the heightened context of s/m, reveals a compulsion to believe in the absolute of paternal authority: this symbolic figure hooks "men" into a lineage of power and meaning.

The argument has not construed s/m practices as exclusively the domain of men, nor implied that the practices are organised around fixed roles for men and for women. The argument has been that the subjective self-determination defended by s/m practitioners is the production of a subjectivity which is at once resistant to and intelligible within gender dimorphism. In s/m practice identity categories of "women" and "men" may well be interchangeable, but the signifying pressure of masculine and feminine subjectivity remains utterly untroubled by the process. When "women" participate in s/m it does not make them into "men", nor does it refute the point that masculinity structures s/m; rather, it reproduces a subjectivity structured by subject-object relations, vested with the interests of gender dimorphism. Making gender difference signify is the way that masculinity can define itself as valuable in an economy of sexual reproductiveness (where feminine sexuality is taken to be self-evidently productive). At face value, gender dimorphism answers that problem. If the self is ontologically rooted in the libido, and the libido is represented by the phallus, then subjectivity from this perspective can only ever be produced in the grid of relations between masculinity and libido, and penis and phallus. Identity constituted in the act of transgressing boundaries – per Bataille's "virile" subject – has to believe in the boundaries that are to be transgressed and thus confers great power upon those categories in the process of struggling to overcome them. The circulating discourses of s/m form part of the proliferation of sexualities that has been advocated by Judith Butler and many of her followers, but they do not *ipso facto* displace the delusions of gender by which subjects achieve intelligibility.

I have argued in Section 1 that categories of gender and sexual identity are delusional (not strategic, not determinant), to move analysis beyond the routine positions of compliance or transgression. Gender identification appears more readily to analysis as an internalised horizon of assumption – an inherited framework for subjectivity – rather than a discernibly analysable thing. As the previous chapters have established, the more we foreground gender in our analyses, the less stable a ground it is for subjectivity. To overcome the subject-object binary of the sex/gender system requires nothing less than relinquishing the delusion of gender. Section 2 explores forms and functions of intersubjectivity that support the abandonment of the subject-object bind.

SECTION 2

4 RECEPTION THEORY AND THE RISE OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY

The analysis in Section 1 has represented the drive for congruence between sex, gender and sexuality as a persistent cultural reading practice. The first three chapters explored the limits of subjective self-avowal in literal and literary-critical forms of cross-dressing, in the bodily assertions of transgenderism and in the sex radical discourses of s/m. Chapter 1 worked with tropes of the cross-dressed subject. Whether critics celebrate the cross-dressed subject for transgressing gender dimorphism, or suspect it of entrenching gender dimorphism, their critiques are typically launched from one of the poles of gender oppositionality through unarticulated appeals to essentialism (as experience, biology, politics). The argument in that chapter sought to articulate the various forms of essentialism underwriting the critical receptions and constructions of the cross-dressed subject. Chapter 2 worked with the tensions between textual and essentialist readings of transgenderism represented in filmic, medical and legal discourses. In fictions such as *The Crying Game*, where the postoperative transgendered subject reorganises biology to express a "chosen" gender, congruence and dimorphism are reasserted at the expense of the "feminine"; in medical discourses transgenderism is put to the service of heterosexism to exclude homosexuality and, in legal discourses, to regulate property exchange. In the case of transgenderists, not even biology – the bedrock of essentialism as it is traditionally deployed – could provide with authority the grounds for a subject position intelligible within the sex/gender system; in particular when the transgendered "subject" is "read" within the discursive sphere of the law. Chapter 3 critiqued discourses of sadomasochism within a broader frame of their influences and representations. I took the "safe word" as a key to analysing the limits of the counter-cultural status claimed for s/m. The subtext for the identity of the s/m outlaw is the interminable project of defining the masculine subject. While gender roles in s/m practices are rhetorically reversible, the subject-object relations governing their signification are, in effect, distorted recitations of the sex/gender system.

The following questions arise from the analyses in Section 1: by what reflex or act of will does the subject seek to achieve standing at the cost of acquiring and reciting the laws of gender dimorphism? Whose will sustains the delusions of gender that perpetuate the signifying force of the sex/gender system? What conditions are necessary to sway reading practices from reflexively representing subjective differences through the controlling lens of gender dimorphism? The different counter-cultural practices examined in Section 1 met the limits of their sex/gender radicalism emphatically at the focal point of their reception. Consequently, here I address the role of the reader, and of reading practices, in rendering subjects intelligible. Relinquishing a subject-object model for subjectivity, I consider the intellectual and political implications of an intersubjective epistemology. I examine the conditions necessary for rethinking reading practices; the role of individual and cultural reception for an intersubjective perspective, and the indispensable presence of will (deployed as agency and choice) in the process. The final two chapters (5 and 6) develop a literary response to the questions arising from Section 1, through an analysis of practices of reading that have made meaning of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: a biography*. This chapter frames those analyses of *Orlando* by arguing for an intellectual continuity in the projects of Woolf, reception theory and quantum physics.

At the time Woolf was writing *Orlando* a group of theoretical physicists that included Einstein, Heisenberg, Schrödinger, Planck, Dirac and Bohr, met in Brussels to focus on the development of quantum theory and cast into doubt some of the axioms of classical physics.¹ During that same modernist period Russian Formalists were theorising literary form, politics and readership which influenced the development of reception theory. The intellectual projects of Woolf, reception theory and quantum physics coincide temporally and to that extent share a modernist intellectual horizon. Beyond that temporal concurrence, however, I propose a more important connection. The significance for my argument of considering the discursive fields of Woolf's *Orlando*, reception theory and quantum physics together is to elicit their parallel concerns with the epistemological and ontological implications, for their respective worlds, of a transformation of perspective from a subject-object to an intersubjective dynamic. I place quantum physics and reception theory within the same philosophical system as Woolf to the extent that they model the epistemological movement toward intersubjectivity. In my interpretation intersubjectivity is, for Woolf and for reception theory, the most emancipated and, for physics, the truest, model of social and

¹ For a discussion of the significance of this meeting see McEvoy and Zarate (1996).

phenomenal exchange. Woolf redefined characterisation and the form of the novel; quantum physics turned from a transcendent, mechanical Newtonian perspective on the phenomenal world to an immanent and relative perspective that elevated Uncertainty to a Principle; the Formalist precursors to reception theory renegotiated the locus of literary meaning from the sovereignty of the author to the structures of the text. To develop the analysis of intersubjectivity foreshadowed in Section 1, I begin with an examination of the "subject" in reception theory. How quantum ideas contribute to a model for intersubjectivity is discussed at the end of this chapter.

On the brink of the Second World War Woolf wrote in *Three Guineas* that fascism and nazism were as much a psychic and internal threat as an external reality, and her pacifism focused on addressing England's own fascism (such as its hunting rituals) embedded in the very concept of masculinity. Thus, for Woolf, the masculine priority of gender dimorphism was central to the cultural dynamics, the subject-object relations that create the conditions for war. Asserting the interdependence of the privileged personal pronoun with patriarchy and Fascism, Woolf wanted to move narrative away from the "damned egotistical self" (cited in Lee, 1996: 523). In the late 1930s she was formulating the idea for a book on literary history – to be called *Anon* or *The Reader* – to address the unconscious mind of the reader. These ideas were already taking form in *Orlando* where she begins the move from a subject-object model of address to an intersubjective model, articulating relations between the narrator and narratee, the text and its reception.

Momentum for theorising reception was gathering at the time that Woolf wrote *Orlando*, though it can be argued that the intellectual enterprise of reception theory peaked in the 1960s and early 1970s in Germany in the work of Jauss and Iser. Reception theory formulates specific questions concerning subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and the impact of reception at the micro level (consciousness) as much as at the macro level (culture). These questions are implicitly present in the aesthetics of *Orlando*. The forms that intersubjective processes of text-reception might take, and the political implications of such forms, are questions central to the work of reception theorists.

1 CONTEXTS OF RECEPTION THEORY

Theories of reception and response have a discontinuous history in the broader context of literary criticism. Those that emerged early this century were characterised by formalist and Marxist analyses; later they diverged into branches of phenomenological

and psychological analyses of the individual reader, structuralist and text-based analyses, and ethnographic studies of specific audiences. Reception theories inquire into the processes by which history, canonical cultural products and meaning are transmitted across time. They ask: what is the significance of our literary inheritance? What do we make of it for our times, and how do we proceed with our own textual practices? The broad scope of the questions addressed offers a frame for the internal divagations of reception theories; and the inability to fix them into a unified theory might account for their relative neglect in much cultural practice. To bring together the complex issues that structure the question of a text's reception, I offer a thematic reading of reception theory that highlights its approach to intersubjectivity. This frames the concerns of reception theory that *Orlando* envisions.

1.1 Influences

Reception theories are less polemical now that decentralised and perspectival methods of analysis have greater traction. It is understood more explicitly that the observer affects the observed, that objective knowledge is not possible, that "truths" are relative to the perspective from which they emerge, and that the mind works to organise fragments into wholes.² For literature this means that no text is self-evident, and that meaning is constructed somewhere in the space between addresser, addressee, text and context. In their attempts to account for the complexity of textual transmission and the creation of meaning and history, more recent theories tend to privilege reader-based or text-based analyses. Wolfgang Iser, whose thinking was germinal in American reader response criticism, conceived the problem of reception in terms of the "implied reader". If texts are plural then it was necessary to examine the effects of the text on the reader. He divided the reader into "implied" and "actual". The implied reader is a textual construct eliciting specific responses. The "actual reader" negotiates these invocations through the prism of their own experience. For Iser, the text narrows the possible readings that can be actualised by a reader, and the reader's consciousness is altered slightly by the viewpoints dramatised in the text; but the domain of meaning-making is the reader's experience. Prince (1973) follows Iser in his focus on the "narratee": just as narrators are defined as omniscient, unreliable or implied, Prince applies this discrimination to the types of reader whom the narrator addresses, and he asserts a distinction between the actual reader and narratee. Fish (1972) accords priority in

² I refer in the broadest sense here to epistemological shifts that took hold in the latter half of the twentieth century, influenced by thinking from the fields of quantum physics, psychology, psychoanalysis and critical theory – to name an obvious few. In particular the acknowledgement of perspective as a strategy for decentring univocalism owes much to the emancipatory work of Russian linguists such as Mikhail Bakhtin as well as to the ongoing critique of patriarchy carried out in feminist and queer discourses.

reception to the reader's experience; Holland (1975) and Bleich (1978) attribute the creation of meaning to the specificities of the reader's psychology. With the influence of postmodernism, Riffaterre (1978) attributes the process to literary competence, and Culler (1981) to conventions of reading. Their diverse perspectives suggest that the process of reception is far-reaching and that literary and cultural critiques are constrained to treat, according to their politics, only a certain component of the meaning-making process of reading texts.

The historic and conceptual range of reception theory is defined by Robert Holub in reference to its origins: 'the entire tradition of rhetoric and its relationship to poetic theory can ... be viewed as a precursor [to reception theory] by virtue of its focus on the impact of oral and written communication on the listener or reader'; moreover, he argues, 'the entire aesthetic tradition of the eighteenth century, from its beginnings as a separate branch of philosophical enquiry in Baumgarten's 1750 treatise *Aesthetica* to Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790), relies on notions of what the artwork does as much as what it is' (Holub, 1984: 13).³ Whether it is necessary to invoke such a sweep of intellectual labour and lineage to signal the importance of reception in critiques of cultural production, Holub's interpretation situates reception within the function of criticism rather than on its margins. Intersubjectivity, if not named as such, has been implicit within this function. A limitation of the analyses by Bleich, Prince, Fish *et al.*, introduced above, is that none fully addresses the question of intersubjectivity within reception. Intersubjectivity is central to the question of agency in textual reception. Hans Robert Jauss, a Romance scholar from the University of Constance in West Germany, and Mikhail Bakhtin from the context of post-revolutionary Russia, both foregrounded the role of intersubjectivity in textual reception. For this reason, and because theorists from the Constance School have been instrumental in the establishment of Reception theory, I limit this discussion to their specific influences.

There are two distinct lineages in Reception theory, both hailing from the aesthetic theorists at the University of Constance. Jauss constructed his *Rezeptionsaesthetik* from a historiographical perspective, regarding cultural products from within their historical context. Iser, a scholar of English literature, developed his "phenomenology of reading" from a text-based orientation, regarding the text as a closed system. Jauss's main influence was Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics, where the aesthetic and

³ In his Introduction Holub claims that no area of literary endeavour has been untouched by reception theory (1984: xi). Scholarship on reception theory tends to be organised now into anthologies and introductory texts. It is engaged retrospectively, or with a view to its reinvigoration, rather than as an ongoing debate. My discussion draws specifically on three such works: Holub (1984, 1992) and Bernard-Donals (1994); as well as from the three key texts in English by Jauss: (1982a, 1982b and 1989).

everyday linguistic constructs, and their readers, were historically situated; whereas Iser's main influence was Roman Ingarden and Husserlian phenomenology. Iser's work in *The Act of Reading* and *The Implied Reader* focuses on the individual subject's cognition of aesthetic objects, and the role of language in the constitution of intersubjective relations; the subjective approach de-emphasises a broader social context for the subject. From their specific backgrounds, then, Jauss leant toward the macrocosm of reception, Iser toward the microcosm of response. *Rezeption* (reception) and *Wirkung* (response, effect) are distinct in that *Rezeption* relates to the reader, *Wirkung*, to the text. "Reception theory" supports the shift in emphasis from the author and the work to the text and the reader. It is an umbrella term that includes empirical research as well as the work of Jauss and Iser. This German position is distinguished from the American "reader-response criticism". While the latter denotes a shift in attention from the author of a work to the text and reader, it also encompasses a broad and diverse range of approaches including Norman Holland's "transactive criticism", Jonathan Culler's structuralist poetics, and Stanley Fish's affective stylistics. The designation "reader response" is retrospective and does not signify a unified movement. Reception theory is by contrast a more conscious and collective undertaking. It represents a reaction to social, intellectual, and literary developments in West Germany during the late 1960s, with its intellectual centre of gravity being the University of Constance (Holub, 1984: xiii). Another key indicator of their separate concerns is a lack of mutual influence. Iser's work has reached into both groups, but otherwise the two have had no dialogue. Though I focus on the more collective undertaking of Reception theory, reader-response is not always entirely distinct and my discussion moves between the two.

1.2 Russian Formalism

The most immediate influence on the work of Jauss and Iser was Russian Formalism. Russian Formalists distinguish between story and plot: plot (*sjuzet*) is literary, whereas story (*fabula*) is the raw material, which is crafted by the writer. Importantly, following Shklovsky's essay on Sterne, this distinction had a revolutionary edge. *Tristram Shandy* was more than the arrangement of its story-incidents; it was also told a story of the "devices" used to interrupt and delay the narration. *Orlando* is structured accordingly, and in 1930 (as I discuss in Chapter 5) two of the French reviewers of *Orlando* compare it to the Russian style of the time, implicitly associating its conscious structuring of plot and story to the project of Russian Formalism. Formalism reverses the usual priority of content over plot, in order to foreground formal devices. The Formalists were motivated by Futurism's opposition to bourgeois decadence and the elevated humanism of the Symbolists. Futurism effected a literary shift from absolutist

values of poetry to the specificities of the material industrial world. Their notion of the "self-sufficient word" drew attention away from referentiality toward the materiality of the word. Futurists backed the 1917 Revolution, reconceiving the artist's role as one of construction; and to literalise this new alignment to the proletarian workers, Constructivists chose factories as the sites to craft their "objects" (writing). Formalists' emphasis thus shifted to the technical aspects of literary production and to a reconception of the literary producer. No longer a "guardian of the mystery", the poet was now described in labouring terms as a "technician", and a "foreman". Shklovsky defined literature as the product of the stylistic devices employed in it.

Trotsky's critique of Formalism in *Literature and Revolution* (1924) influenced the gradual inclusion of social critique into Formalism. For instance, the Bakhtin school included both formalist and Marxist analyses. By the 1930s Jakobson's structuralist formalism was taken over into Czech formalism, by the Prague Linguistic Circle. Nazism ended it. Some of the Formalists, Rene Wellek and Roman Jakobson, emigrated to the USA and during the 1940s and 1950s influenced the development of New Criticism. At its most formal, structuralism can do little other than gesture to shape and to instances of utterance. With no implicit critique of any larger social structure, it lapsed easily into New Criticism. When formalist criticism becomes an end in itself it loses its edge as a critique of regimes of authority. But when it is deployed to expose the apparent universality of truth claims as ideologically specific, and endorses the role of readers in producing meaning, it enables new political claims. Its potential to challenge oppressive structures was evident to the German authorities (under Nazism) who moved against it and the broader culture of artistic experimentation that emanated from the Weimar Republic.

Shklovsky's "defamiliarisation" was one of the most incisive Formalist concepts. Here art emphasises the act of *perceiving* in one's relationship to objects, to break down the mundane effects of automatisations. Art's purpose is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived, not as they are known. Codes of meaning are a shorthand, eliding important material; whereas slow and detailed description opens up a breadth and depth of information about the slightest movement and extends its meaning beyond the conventional clichés. Needless to say, the choice of things described still restricts the reader's freedom from a completely open-ended interpretation. Descriptions can be no more innocent than the clichés they replace. But that restrictive textual agency is important, as an entirely open-ended interpretation can achieve neither change nor exchange between reader and text. For Formalism the object in the art was of no consequence; the focus was instead on the "artfulness" of the object. To draw the

reader's awareness to the encodedness of art frees them from automatism, and allows a more autonomous reception of cultural products, informed by choice. Formalism saw itself as presenting the *transformation of perception*; as modelling the process of resistance. The later Formalist concept of the "device" foregrounded structure over content, and asserted a broader context and a constitutive relation between text and reader.

With the increasing inclusion of "context" in literary analysis, Formalists dropped the concept of "device" in favour of "function". A device may be in one context apparent, in another, automatised. It is not always perceived by the reader as a technical strategy, and will function differently according to context. By 1935 linguist Roman Jakobson was working with the newer Formalist concept of "the dominant". The dominant is the organising principle of a text, the leading component of a work which governs and transforms its other components.⁴ Defamiliarisation is motivated by the energy of change, while automatised responses are inimical to change; thus conventions and forms must undergo continual investigation and reformation to avoid passivity, and its corollary of authoritarianism. In Formalism the elements of the system, such as syntax, rhythm, plot, diction, are not changed: what changes is the way they function. In 'Literature and Biography' Boris Tomashevsky suggested that not only the analysis of formal devices but also the "ideal biography" (the received legend of the author's life) mediates between text and reader. Holub explains this unusual move:

Considering the Formalists' rejection of traditional scholarship with its dependence on the "life-and-work" method, we would expect biography in particular to be banished from critical studies. But this is so only when the scholar uses it to illuminate the life of the author. It is not true, Tomashevskii suggests, when one examines it for its literary function. The relationship of biography to literature is not a question of the genesis or description of the work, but rather of its reception. (1984: 25)⁵

⁴ *Orlando's* dominant is the mediating voice of the biographer; time and culture in the text are mediated by the received conventions of the biographer's world (so that the eighteenth century is described in terms of light and clarity, the nineteenth century announced by fog).

⁵ Tomashevsky's point is to read the author's biography as a function of the reception of their works, not as a source for the meaning of their works. This is enlightening for the effects of Woolf's "ideal biography" on the reception of her texts. Tomashevsky's reference to the biography as "ideal" makes clear the futility and undesirability of seeking access to the "real" through biography. In Chapter 6 I use Woolf's biography (narrated in her letters and by biographers such as Lee) in two ways. I examine first how the initial feminist receptions of Woolf were mediated by their understanding of her biographically. In Tomashevsky's sense, the texts did not illuminate the life, rather the life created the conditions for the reception of the text. The life itself thus acquired a textual function. In a second way I use Tomashevsky's notion of the function of the "ideal biography" to consider the relationship of Woolf's own biography to *Orlando*, her "biography" of Vita-Sackville West.

By 1929 in his essay 'On Literary Evolution' Tynianov had developed his arguments beyond Shklovsky's theory and taken literary evolution to be the "replacement of systems". He distinguished between functions within a text (syn-functions) and functions within the literary system in which the text exists (auto-functions): the single work against the historical period, space against time. This latter development enabled a more differentiated analysis of the devices that characterise literary change. Now literary history becomes a continuous replacement of one group of dominants by another. Before moving to Jauss's *Rezeptionsaesthetik* and to Bakhtin, I deal briefly with the influence of phenomenology on these debates.

1.3 Iser and the limits of Phenomenology for intersubjective agency

A phenomenological approach sees texts as dependent for their meaning on the historical situation of their reception and it stresses the role of the perceiver in determining meaning. For Husserl, perhaps the first phenomenologist, the proper object for philosophical investigation is not external matter but the objects of consciousness. That to which consciousness is directed is the only perceptible "reality". In literary criticism this translated into a treatment of the text as an entree into the author's consciousness, which reveals the essence of the writing as it appears in the critic's consciousness. This assumes a mind-to mind transmission of meaning from the author to the critic via the text. Heidegger rejected this "objective" view, in favour of a situational approach. He argued that consciousness both projects the phenomenal world and is subjected to the world by the very nature of *dasein*, the givenness of existence. Compelled to merge with the object of consciousness, thought is always in a context, always within a subjective history. In 1975 Gadamer in *Truth and Method* developed this approach for literary theory. For him literary works do not arrive as discrete packages of meaning, but are dependent for their meaning on the historical situation of their reception.

Ingarden took Husserlian phenomenology to the examination of literature, separating aesthetic effect from historical effect, because of the subjective history in which we consume art, and its separateness from a "socially interacted" response. Thus for Ingarden there is an impasse between consumption of an aesthetic object and concretisation of that experience into ethical action. In opposing mental acts (of consciousness) to action in the world, he cannot account for how – indeed denies that – reception can constitute change or resistance. Rene Wellek construed Ingarden's principles as New Critical because he analysed literature intrinsically; in Germany, on the other hand, Ingarden's reputation with reception theorists rested more on his focus on the reading process and cognition of literature. These divergent responses partly

result from the reception of two different works. Wellek based his reception of Ingarden on *The Literary Work of Art*, the Germans on *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*. Ingarden saw literature as dependent on acts of consciousness, because of the inevitable indeterminacy of literary works (compared with the determinacy and autonomy of real or ideal objects).

All objects, according to phenomenological theory, have an infinite number of determinants, and no act of cognition can take into account every determinant of any particular object. But while a real object must have a *particular* determinant – a real object cannot be merely colored; it must have a particular color – the objects in a literary work, because they are intentionally projected from meaning units and aspects, must retain some degree of indeterminacy. (Holub, 1984: 25)

Ingarden divided the literary work into four layers and two dimensions. The layers comprise “word-sounds” (and the potential for aesthetic effects including rhythm and rhyme); meaning units (words, sentences, paragraphs); represented objects; and the schematised aspects by which these objects appear. The dimensions comprise the four strata together, a polyphonic harmony associated with aesthetic value (space); and the temporal dimension, the sequences of meaning units. The reader’s cognition is an interactive part of the reading process. The stratum of word-sounds is activated by the reader silently or aloud; competent readings also actualise many of the meaning units, and provide continuity along the temporal dimension. Through the process of what Ingarden calls “concretization” the reader brings to any indetermination a complementing determination, a process he regards as “filling in” the gaps.⁶ For Ingarden this often unconscious activity is essential to the realisation of meaning. Concretisation mobilises a reader’s “phantasy”, creativity, skill and perspicuity, and is thus subject to variability. This concretion of the work raises it to a level of “imaginational experience”, but is not to be confused with a psychic state. This is because although the reader’s experiences influence their reception of a text, the concretion is codetermined by the text. Ingarden’s represents the first significant attempt to account for the relationship between the text and its specific *cognitive* renderings.

Following Ingarden, Iser considers the relation between text and “social reality” and text and subject. The textual conventions that the author utilises to organise material

⁶ According to Holub, Ingarden uses the term “concretization” ‘to designate the result of actualizing the potentialities, objectifying the sense-units, and concretizing the indeterminacies in a given text’. (1984: 26)

creates a "system of perspectives" revealing the author's view. This forms the text's "potential" structure that the reader can realise. The text thus guides the reading activities of "consistency-building" and "image-making". Guided by the text the reader assembles the configurative meaning and is in turn affected by the assembling process. Iser sees the reader's goal as striving to complete the *gestalt*, to resolve the range of meanings into a coherent whole. This notion of wholeness hinders his project of tracking intersubjectivity, which must, constitutionally, remain a process, and is never closed off. Iser's "implied reader" follows his logic of the textual effects guiding the reader; the reader is "implied" by the language of the text. In this way Iser tries to account for the presence of a reader without invoking the specific reader. By locating meaning in the text itself – through the "potential" structure and the "implied" reader – Iser eliminates the agency of the reading subject. Iser identifies the "construct" of the reading, the "merging" of subject and object, as "an effect to be experienced" (Bernard-Donals, 1984: 56). The difficulties of subjective agency are ultimately left unaddressed in any full or satisfying manner by this form of Reception theory. The limitation of these approaches is in conceptualising agency. Of all the reception and reader response theorists Jauss comes closest to addressing this limitation and defining motion in the context of reception. Significantly, his response has recourse to a scientific model.

1.4 Jauss

In 1969 Jauss's essay 'The Change in Paradigm of Literary Scholarship' predicted a coming revolution in literary studies. Following Thomas S. Kuhn's model of scientific revolutions, Jauss drew parallels between natural science and the study of literature, arguing that development in literary scholarship is not a gradual, incremental acquisition of knowledge about literature and literary works, but is characterized by qualitative jumps, discontinuities, and original points of departure. Literary methodology and canonical texts are organised by such a paradigm, insofar as the paradigm creates both the objects and techniques for interpretation. Holub points to a shift in German scholarship from the Renaissance classical-humanist paradigm, to a nineteenth-century historicist-positivist causal approach to literature, which arose in the context of the move toward national unity throughout Europe, to an aesthetic-formalist approach that includes Russian Formalism and New Criticism (Holub, 1984: 2). This appears as a shift from the *temporality* (history) of texts to *spatialism* (aesthetics), effectively rethinking the literary work as a self-sufficient object for research. After World War II Jauss detected the exhaustion of this paradigm, but in his 1969 essay had yet to determine the methodological orientation of this fourth paradigm. Structuralism and poststructuralism were not taken to be the new direction of this paradigm, but rather, to be signs of crisis in the third paradigm. Their main impact had been to

challenge literary scholarship to deploy categories and procedures developed by linguistics. What does seem to be the likely signature of this fourth paradigm, though Jauss does not say as much, is reception theory. Most methodologies for literary analysis have had to address the questions posed by Reception theory. Reception theory is not methodologically specific. Rather, it is paradigmatic of the enterprise of making meaning from cultural production, and it is evidence of the "birth of the reader".

Reception theory emerged in the 1960s in Germany in an atmosphere of economic and political transformation. Jauss and Iser were both active in the institutional and methodological restructuring of literary studies in West Germany. Reception theory was a methodological answer to the revision of the West German canon. It enabled a "re-reading" of some canonical texts for contemporary West Germany, it justified the analysis of works traditionally excluded from selection, and it provided reasons for these omissions. Moreover, its emphasis on the reader promised a more democratically organisable canon. Literary reception was treated in literary historiography as the interface of history and aesthetics. It was analysed according to two competing methodologies: Marxism and Formalism. Jauss sought to overcome the tensions by taking up the question from the perspective of the reader. He was critical of the "vulgar Marxism" advanced by Georg Lukacs and Lucien Goldmann, because it reduced literature to a reflection of the external world. He was also critical of the limitations of Formalism's *l'art pour l'art* aesthetic, though he welcomed its contributions to aesthetic perception and, in particular, its discovery of the "device". In 'Literary history as a provocation for literary scholarship', a lecture he delivered at the University of Constance in 1967, Jauss criticised literary scholars (German and international) for their turn from history into preoccupations with philosophy, psychology and sociology. His aim was to restore history's centrality in literary studies. *Rezeptionsästhetik* (the "aesthetics of reception") does not aim to discern the historical essence of an artwork through examining its production or by simply describing it. It treats literature instead as a dialectical process of production and reception. In this way Jauss balances the Marxist demand for historical mediations, by situating literature in the larger process of events, with the Formalist concerns, by placing the perceiving subject at the centre of the inquiry.

Literature for Jauss mediates the past and present; literary historiography comprehends the effects of the meanings of the past on the practices of the present. Jauss's notion of the "horizon of expectations" was central to his literary historiography. The term "horizon" already had currency in German philosophy, and through Karl Popper, in

science. The actual phrase "horizon of expectations" had been used by art historian E. H. Gombrich. Jauss thus uses the phrase for his context without defining it in any specific manner. Holub understands it as 'an intersubjective system or structure of expectations, a "system of references" or a mind-set that a hypothetical individual might bring to any text' (1984: 29). Holub problematises the phrase's transcendental impulse, its indeterminacy and its inability to account for its own assumptions about value and evaluation. For him the phrase is limited by Jauss's indebtedness to the Formalist emphasis on perception, through defamiliarisation, to establish literary value. However, I propose that the deliberate vagueness of the phrase has to do with the difficulty of discursively objectifying the subjectivity of a reader's experience before, during and after reading a text. Jauss wants to remove discussion of reception from individual psychology and yet to allow for agency within historical determinations and textual conventions. The "horizon of expectations" describes the criteria that readers use to make sense of literature in a historically specific context. Within this "horizon" are formal codes and conventions for discerning the literary orientation of a text, and for rendering it intelligible – for determining the means by which it produces its intelligibility – in its time. This situates texts within their own contexts, and disallows attributions of universality. For Jauss a literary work is not a monument which reveals its timeless essence in a monologue. Jauss's response to the question of reading a text out of its original context is informed by Gadamer's "hermeneutics", insofar as the "knower" is not held distinct from the "object". A reader's understanding of a literary work is defined by the questions their own cultural context will allow, just as a reader's interest in the work is to discern the questions the work itself was trying to answer in its dialogue with its own context.

Regarding the "horizon of expectations" of its day, an intelligible reading of *Orlando* requires a conscious awareness of those expectations, and a willingness to admit they are mere convention. The horizon may well *look* straight, the text says, but we *know* it is actually bent. *Orlando* says this about conventions of knowledge in general, as well as about specific conventions of sexual and gender identity. This is where its formalism is most pronounced: the text parades the manner in which forms of knowing (horizons of expectation) delimit forms of being. Our systems of knowing poetry, weather, and gender, for instance combine in the text to produce a post-Enlightenment cloudy and foggy England in the nineteenth century where a woman itches for a wedding ring, and where novels end with marriage. The text marks the beginning and ending of historical moments satirically with a change of weather to produce metaphorically the conditions described in the classifications of those moments. The "horizon of expectations" brought to *Orlando* in 1928 is still plainly visible now. The

expectations that were brought to a reading by its contemporaries – pertaining to identification and subjectivity – are the same ones brought by feminist literary critiques to their search for a self-determined woman in the text. As I argue in Chapter 6, the early feminist literary endeavour came with an intent and left with a reduction of Woolf's sexual politics to androgyny.

1.5 The pleasure of intersubjectivity

Although Jauss's essay has received more attention in West Germany than any other essay for the twenty years since its delivery, his position altered soon after its publication. He relinquished the "horizon of expectations" and Formalist interest in perception and defamiliarisation. This move was principally in resistance to what he calls the "aesthetics of negativity", most notably in Theodor Adorno's posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* in 1970. Jauss's problem with the "aesthetics of negativity" was that it posited art as progressive only when oppositional to social practice, and separated from pleasure. According to Jauss, negativity that denies identification with the social condition cannot ground a new scheme for social praxis, and ignores past functions of art. The effectiveness of art is in its dialogic relations with readers, not in its exclusions of them. In asserting primary aesthetic experience against an aesthetic of negativity, Jauss reintroduces pleasure into the equation of the social affect of art. Whilst Roland Barthes too in 1973 reasserts a significance for pleasure, in *The Pleasure of the Text*, for Jauss, Barthes supports only the pleasure of the scholar. Caught within the "self-sufficient linguistic universe" his 'highest happiness ultimately remains the rediscovered eros of the contemplative philologist and his undisturbed preserve: "the paradise of words"' (Jauss, 1982b: 3-45). For Jauss, the experience of aesthetic pleasure has two parts. First, the 'unmediated surrender...of the ego to the object' (consistent in all pleasure); second, the bracketing of the object as an aesthetic one (specific to aesthetic pleasure). Jauss describes the process as 'self-enjoyment in the enjoyment of something other' and thus a movement between subject and object (32). Through reintroducing a democratising notion of pleasure in reception theory Jauss begins to account for – if not name – the process of intersubjectivity.

Jauss describes in this movement between subject and object the 'primary unity of understanding enjoyment and enjoying understanding' (32). In other words, the pleasure – and social effect – of the text, through this intersubjective motion, is in its empathic intelligibility; the way enjoyment is aroused by understanding the "other". This step challenges the practice of the subject-object relation whereby a subject is defined against its object. The exchange between reader and text is interactive and mutually constitutive. Woolf invites just such an attitude in the reader when she asks

readers to *become* the writers whose works they read. Noting the effect on writers of the judgement of readers she construes the reader and writer relationship as one of collaboration (Woolf, 1967 Vol. 2: 1-11). Jauss's revised theory has had scant attention, in contrast to the sustained response to his "provocation" lecture. Holub attributes the virtual absence of response to Jauss's formulation of an aesthetic of reception, to its provocation of French theorists (as aesthetes of negativity) and their followers; and also to Jauss's increasingly erudite tone. More importantly though, he attributes this to Jauss's historical context.

The constituency and mood of [the German critical community] have altered dramatically. No longer are students concerned with participating in a theoretical revolution. No longer are literary scholars eager to make the study of literature relevant again. And no longer are the universities as a system involved with innovation and upheaval. In this climate a theory of aesthetic experience, however novel and necessary, is just another academic enterprise. (Holub, 1984: 82)

While this description of the GDR also well expresses the context in which this thesis is written, its usefulness lies not in any latent nostalgia for those revolutionary times that generated Jauss's initial *Rezeptionsästhetik* but in its reminder of the corollary of experience, and of will. I argued in Chapter 1 for the reinvigoration of "experience". Implicit in that task is the confrontation of the role of will in experience. How else can one account for the lack of response to – the lack of "enjoyment of understanding" – the role of subjectivity in emancipatory practices? Here it could be asked of Jauss's critical community, as de Lauretis asks of feminist critics (cited in the Introduction): what are the material investments and the professional payoffs in this cynical distancing from the emancipatory possibilities of the disciplines they practice?

While Jauss constructs the newly emerging French theorists as "aesthetes of negativity", his implicit critique of a subject-object dynamic foreshadows their decentred subject. In particular Barthes' reader in *S/Z* is textualised, taking shape only as an aggregate of signs. Predating postmodernism, reception theory prioritises the literary over other language, postulating distinctions between high and low culture and privileging literature within the cultural constituents affecting general history. Postmodern textuality brings a more nuanced account of language to literary and cultural debates; yet it cannot resolve the questions that motivate reception theory. To understand history as a system of competing and contested narratives, and truth as a question of interpretation, does not foreclose (indeed it expands) the investigation into how it is that some stories and interpretations are taken up over others. Jauss's notion

of aesthetic experience comes closest to articulating a process of intersubjectivity that emerges from similar insights, if different politics, to those supporting postmodernity. Postmodern textual aesthetics textualise readers alongside texts as a strategy that challenges assumptions about authorial hubris. The attractiveness of reception theory however, is in its focus on the *reading*, rather than the reader or text, to discern the enabling forces that produce and reproduce dominant cultural codes.

Having explored Jauss's nascent model for intersubjectivity, in 'self-enjoyment in the enjoyment of something other', I turn to the related critical work of Bakhtin. One of the most influential thinkers in linguistics and the social realm, Bakhtin here extends the basis for the relationship between intersubjectivity and uncertainty.

1.6 Bakhtin

In the later period of Formalism, the Bakhtin School with its Marxist inheritance made the connection between language and ideology, situating literature within social and economic domains. The new focus was on the dynamic view of language. As an ideologically invested system, language is the site of class (and other) conflict. In its efforts to restrict the meaning of words, according words a "uni-accentual" stress, the dominant class directs the ideological stresses of language (such as in the project of lexicographers), but the impulse of struggle is expressed through the multi-accentuality of signs. Bakhtin was not working with literature as a reflection of the social order. Rather, he focused on how its language can be opened to allow other voices to be heard, beyond the univocality of authority (Bernard-Donals, 1984: 60). Romantics and Formalists saw the literary text as an organic whole, drawn together by the reader. Bakhtin's proposition of polyvocality, by contrast, reveals the layered and open-ended structure of texts: unified only at the cost of silencing diverse voices.

Bakhtin's thought falls between the phenomenological (Ingarden and Iser) and historical (Gadamer and Jauss) theories of reception. He recognises the importance of starting with a theory of subjective cognition – of how a person makes sense of a text – in order to make claims about the relation of aesthetics and history. I have considered some of the blind spots that limit theories of reception, but of equal importance are their starting points: whether they originate from the broad social context, or from specific conceptions of subjectivity. In the monologicistic context of Stalinist Russia, Bakhtin's focus on the *cognitive* possibilities for resistance, his starting point of the *subject*, makes more sense than an analysis of materialist historiography that can too easily lapse into the disempowering reduction of the subject to its context. Along with Iser, Bakhtin claims that the negotiation of language in aesthetic and everyday contexts

constitutes the subject. Whereas Iser's position is weighted toward the text as relatively determinate in its guidance of the reader, for Bakhtin the instability and indeterminacy of the text is what lends force to the process of negotiation between reader and text in the production of meaning and of subjectivity. Unlike the whole (*gestalt*) produced in Iser's account of reading, for Bakhtin the language of the text and of the reading subject are never coincident, hence the emphasis on negotiation; nor, more specifically, is the reading subject rendered self-same in the process. The reading subject is dialogised. 'If this non-coincidence is distinct enough, then the "ground rules", as it were, for their consummation have also to be reestablished along with the utterance' (Bernard-Donals, 1984: 60). Utterance denotes all assertions in language, aesthetic and everyday. The negotiation of language thus alters speaking and reading subjects. Iser's theory renders the reading process a transaction of understanding (at the level of content) between the text/author and the reader. It is a sharing of narrated experiences and represented worlds. Bakhtin by contrast sees the process as one of reorienting and reproducing subjectivity through the negotiation of meaning. The reader interiorises the language of the text (signs/meanings and so on) and re-utters it in different contexts. Subjective agency lies in those processes mediating the utterance, the interiorisation and the reuttering differently of the signs. Rather than Iser's reading subject merging with the textual object, for Bakhtin the 'text is evidence of yet another subject whose acts of answerability are being "consummated" by the reading subject, so in effect reading a text, aesthetic or otherwise, is an intersubjective act which should be considered as such when it is analyzed' (Bernard-Donals, 1984: 63). To this end, the reader must take account of when they are being addressed directly and when they are implicated by the language codes (where the text uses a register similar to the reader's); and the reader must "consummate" the text and configure their own subjectivity. Through this process the reader constitutes a conscious agent of subjectivity.⁷

Jauss's historical project is to understand the role of art in enabling subjects to make sense of the past, to make history coherent, through the aesthetic experience. He posits a relationship between subject (reader) and object (text), and the writing of literary history entails a "fusion of horizons": of the reader's horizon and the horizons of successive readers. Bernard-Donals critiques Jauss on the grounds that he distinguishes

⁷ Bernard-Donals is critical of the change effect in Bakhtin's formulation, on the ground that change at this level is slow and not guaranteed. Poverty, for example, is not materially different after an intersubjective reading experience. His contrast between the luxury of reading and the apparent intransigence of poverty is stark, but potentially disingenuous. From his materialist position, change at levels other than material are politically ineffective. This seems to require a simultaneity of subjective and material change for intersubjectivity to have social relevance. Paradoxically, for a materialist, such simultaneity leaves no room for history. Given the negotiation essential to subjective change, intersubjectivity is likely to be the only social mode that affects material relations in any sustained way.

artistic and everyday language. For Bakhtin it is a difference of degree, for Jauss, of kind. For Jauss, history causes the literary conventions that are a constant, rather than the literary text comprising ideological negotiations of language codes that the author has assembled in the text. If history and art are thus determined, there is little mediating role for the subject. The problem with articulating what intersubjectivity is and how it works is clearly a function of a practice of reading that is propelled by subject-object relations. For instance, in trying to account for intersubjectivity – for the relations between, and the historical context of, the author, text and reader – Ingarden and Iser posit the text as an object and ignore the ideological mediatedness of subjective cognition. Jauss and Gadamer make the same problematic move in relation to history. History becomes the constant against which the variable flows of reception and cognition are measured. Intersubjectivity cannot be accounted for in a subject-object dynamic: whether this be the reader/subject over the text/object or the text/subject over history/object. Bakhtin's approach to intersubjectivity, including the ideological embeddedness of a text's language systems and the reader's language systems in relation to it, sees the reader negotiating the conflict of experience between their own language systems (speech genres) and those of the text they read. This turns the reader into a critic of language systems and removes the focus from the subjective relationship between the reader and the text. What it cannot do though is allow for differences between readers (only for differences between a reader and the text); and it assumes that a materialist analysis is part of the reader's horizon.

What I find most useful in Bakhtin for my analysis of intersubjectivity is his conviction that indeterminacy drives intersubjectivity. Dialogism, which is the cognition of necessary inconsistencies between subjective interpretations of utterances, corresponds to resistance and negotiation. Monologism corresponds to authoritarianism. It is the force of will that energises this notion. The subject has to take account of their subjective agency in moment-to-moment response to the mediations (especially language) of the real. Agency is not a reflexive process but a question of will. This is implicit in Bakhtin: readers may consummate a text as relatively "monologic" or "dialogic" depending upon their own complicities in interiorising and uttering ideological material (Bakhtin, 1981: 41-83). Iser, Ingarden and Gadamer have all argued for the completion, *gestalt*, or resolution of textual (historical and subjective) indeterminacies and inconsistencies. Bakhtin posits inconsistencies as the reality of intersubjective relations and as the prompt for the negotiation of meaning. Intersubjectivity is defined by disjunction, and communication is predicated on "reading" across disjunction.

Bakhtin's position falters in its conflation of language and reality. It may be strategic to confine analysis of "reality" (materiality, lived relations, action) to its mediation through language, but it is not sufficient simply to collapse them together. Bernard-Donals criticises Bakhtin's failure to access the 'extra-linguistic forces that are as important to the formation of the subject and play a role in the construction of the very language which is so central to Bakhtin's theory' (Bernard-Donals, 1984: 86). From my perspective, those extra-linguistic forces amount to subjective agency. The choices we make, and the exertions of our will, give force to cultural meanings; as, for example, in our participation in the recitation of gender dimorphism through our language use, fashion choices, lifestyles, refusals of difference. Though Bakhtin allows for this, his arguments are directed more specifically at language as the tool for struggle. Struggles over the legitimisation and contestation of authority take place in language but are not exclusive to nor satisfied by it. Without reference to what falls outside symbolic and social struggles, how can this contestation have any real effect? That "outside" is agency, the force of will that motivates those meanings into bodily, social and cultural representations. Subjective agency need not reside simply in a refusal of codes. It operates whenever there is response, in the choices the subject makes, in an interior sense, intellectually, psychically, to assent to speech genres or to reject them, in the process of interpretation and reiteration. It exists as much in the process of choosing as in the choices made.

The matter of will inevitably circumscribes, even as it enables, the project of reception theory. Two decades after his most influential essay, Jauss produced a reading of the history and reception of his own reception theory. The retrospective piece sharpens some of the terms of reception theory and acknowledges the emancipatory double edge of will. The summary of Jauss's retrospective completes this analysis of Reception theory. The final section of the chapter takes up the parallel discourse of intersubjectivity within quantum physics to situate Woolf's thought – in *Orlando* – alongside this other radically new epistemological paradigm of the early twentieth century.

1.7 Jauss updated

In 'The Theory of Reception: a retrospective of its unrecognized prehistory' Jauss claims that the response to the Constance School reception theory created a "paradigmatic shift in literary theory" (Jauss, 1990: 54). This shift is more evident now, he suggests, through the project of historicising reception theory. Such a process confirms the hermeneutic principle that the prehistory of a significant shift of events be recognised only by looking at its post-history (54). The "aesthetics of reception"

(*rezeptions- und Wirkungsästhetik*), his term uniting reception theory with reader-response theory, had required the history of literature and the arts 'to be seen henceforth as a process of aesthetic communication in which the three logically distinguishable entities – author, work and recipient (reader, listener or observer, critic or audience) – participate in equal measure' (53). To underline the implicit intersubjectivity of this process he cautions 'in cases where the recipient is not the subject but only the object of the activity defined by reception, we cannot talk about reception in the true sense of the word' (57). Reception is thus defined as constitutively interactive and intersubjective. Recognising the overlap of his work with that of Iser he defines the current state of reception theory:

in a critical continuation of Roman Ingarden's phenomenological aesthetics, the Constance School has since 1967 been investigating and systematically describing the constitution and development of meaning which takes place in the appropriation of the aesthetic object and in the history of its reception. The aim of this School is to describe the nature of aesthetic activity, firstly in the realm of the *implicit* reader, and secondly in the realm of the *historical* reader, which involves a continuous change of horizon in and through understanding and interpretation. This brief formula is intended to indicate to what extent Wolfgang Iser's theoretical approach and my own complement one another. (59)

His solution to the interface of implicit and historical reader, textual effect and text's reception is this:

Today, the interaction of effect and reception is commonly defined in such a way that *effect* is the name given to the element of concretization determined by the text, while *reception* is the element determined by the person to whom the text is addressed. Thus the implication of the text and the explication of the addressee, the implicit and the historical reader, are dependent on one another, and the text itself is thus able to limit the arbitrariness of interpretation, guaranteeing the continuity of its experience beyond the present act of reception. (60)

These definitions take account of the agency of the reader without collapsing the text and reader into an arbitrary play of signs. Jauss critiques the anti-reader perspectives of the last twenty years, including New Criticism's "aesthetics of the self-sufficient work", that posits an ideal (rather than historical) reader; and structuralism's "death of the subject" and consequent "enthroning of self-sufficient *écriture*" (65). He also questions the purported origins of this debate in Derrida (1967) *De la Grammatologie*, whose critique of logocentrism continues a prior debate in Germany and in Italy. 'In the wake

of Derrida the theory of textuality, defined as "the play of differences", remained one-sidedly oriented towards the productive side of aesthetic activity' (65). He opposes Derrida to Eco (1962) *Opera Aperta*, who 'drafted the first theory of an open, constantly progressing constitution of meaning, a theory by which the work of art, seen as an open structure, requires the active co-production of the recipient and brings about a historical variety of concretizations without in the process ceasing to be *one* work' (66). Jauss draws on similarities with Walter Benjamin and Jean Paul Sartre who both focus on history, not as an imposed continuum but as a process of creation and engagement, in the present. Jauss concludes his retrospective with a citation from Italo Calvino's reader in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. He discerns in the function of Ludmilla the "quintessence of all reception theory":

[Ludmilla] follows a hermeneutic maxim ... which long went unrecognized and which the Constance School gave a name to, and ... which, presumably, is still valid in the postmodern era: 'I expect readers to read in my books something I didn't know, but I can expect it only from those who wish to read something they didn't know'. (69)

Here Jauss codifies the strength and the limit of what reception theory offers to theories of the subject. Intelligibility cannot be compelled; it is an act of subjective will.

2 QUANTUM PHYSICS AND THE DISCOVERY OF CHOICE

At the start of this chapter I argued for the intellectual congruity of the approaches to intersubjectivity in *Orlando*, reception theory and quantum physics. Quantum physics turned from a transcendent, mechanical, newtonian perspective on the phenomenal world to an immanent and relative perspective that elevated Uncertainty to a Principle. To open out those statements calls for a caveat, though I would not be the first to align Woolf's thought with the concerns of quantum physics, particularly with relativity.⁸

⁸ Woolf's famous declaration that 'in or about December, 1910, human character changed' (1967, Vol. 1:320) has been taken as a reference to the first post-impressionist art exhibition (organised by Roger Fry in 1910-11). In 1910 Edward VII also died, amplifying Woolf's critique of the declining "Edwardian" novelists (particularly for their depictions of character), and the rise of her generation of writers, the "Georgians". But interpretation of her declaration can expand to include Leonard Woolf's excitement, recorded in his autobiography, of being in London in 1911 when Freud and physicists Einstein and Rutherford were promising to 'revolutionize our knowledge of our own minds and of the universe', (1980: 21). In the draft version of 'Character in Fiction', a paper read to the Cambridge "Heretics" society, Woolf argued that an emphasis on character had developed amongst the Georgians because the world had been changed radically by scientific theories (see Hussey, 1995: 169). If 1911 was held to be an exciting time for modern thought, the implications of the work of early twentieth-century physicists could not have failed to surface as a hot topic amongst the Bloomsbury group in the 1920s with the event of the publication of Einstein's second theory of relativity and the radical innovations (discussed in the following section) of quantum theory in the late 1920s.

It was a picture of today as well as of tomorrow. It was a picture of an ideal that had to be achieved, not just for the sake of the world, but for the sake of the people who lived in it.

[illegible]

1. The drug itself has no known toxicity and is not
2. A very mild, non-specific, non-inflammatory
3. A red and thick vaginal discharge is common
4. There is no "burning" or "itching" of the vagina.

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USED TO THE "IT OF THE" GET FOR AN INCREASE IN THE PRICE OF
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1. The first group of variables includes the following:

[illegible][illegible]

1. *Explain the importance of the following factors in the design of a control system:*
 (a) *Stability* (b) *Transient response* (c) *Steady-state error* (d) *Bandwidth*
 (e) *Robustness* (f) *Cost* (g) *Reliability* (h) *Maintainability* (i) *Flexibility*
 (j) *Scalability* (k) *Interference rejection* (l) *Disturbance rejection* (m) *Noise rejection*
 (n) *Power consumption* (o) *Size* (p) *Weight* (q) *Material selection* (r) *Manufacturing process*
 (s) *Assembly* (t) *Testing* (u) *Documentation* (v) *Compliance* (w) *Safety* (x) *Security*
 (y) *Environmental protection* (z) *Human factors* (aa) *Ergonomics* (ab) *Accessibility*
 (ac) *Usability* (ad) *Learnability* (ae) *Performance* (af) *Efficiency* (ag) *Effectiveness*
 (ah) *Reliability* (ai) *Maintainability* (aj) *Flexibility* (ak) *Scalability* (al) *Interference rejection*
 (am) *Disturbance rejection* (an) *Noise rejection* (ao) *Power consumption* (ap) *Size*
 (aq) *Weight* (ar) *Material selection* (as) *Manufacturing process* (at) *Assembly*
 (au) *Testing* (av) *Documentation* (aw) *Compliance* (ax) *Safety* (ay) *Security*
 (az) *Environmental protection* (ba) *Human factors* (bb) *Ergonomics* (bc) *Accessibility*
 (bd) *Usability* (be) *Learnability* (bf) *Performance* (bg) *Efficiency* (bh) *Effectiveness*
 (bi) *Reliability* (bj) *Maintainability* (bk) *Flexibility* (bl) *Scalability* (bm) *Interference rejection*
 (bn) *Disturbance rejection* (bo) *Noise rejection* (bp) *Power consumption* (bq) *Size*
 (br) *Weight* (bs) *Material selection* (bt) *Manufacturing process* (bu) *Assembly*
 (bv) *Testing* (bv) *Documentation* (bw) *Compliance* (bx) *Safety* (by) *Security*
 (bz) *Environmental protection* (ca) *Human factors* (cb) *Ergonomics* (cc) *Accessibility*
 (cd) *Usability* (ce) *Learnability* (cf) *Performance* (cg) *Efficiency* (ch) *Effectiveness*
 (ci) *Reliability* (cj) *Maintainability* (ck) *Flexibility* (cl) *Scalability* (cm) *Interference rejection*
 (cn) *Disturbance rejection* (co) *Noise rejection* (cp) *Power consumption* (cq) *Size*
 (cr) *Weight* (cs) *Material selection* (ct) *Manufacturing process* (cu) *Assembly*
 (cv) *Testing* (cv) *Documentation* (cw) *Compliance* (cx) *Safety* (cy) *Security*
 (cz) *Environmental protection* (da) *Human factors* (db) *Ergonomics* (dc) *Accessibility*
 (dd) *Usability* (de) *Learnability* (df) *Performance* (dg) *Efficiency* (dh) *Effectiveness*
 (di) *Reliability* (dj) *Maintainability* (dk) *Flexibility* (dl) *Scalability* (dm) *Interference rejection*
 (dn) *Disturbance rejection* (do) *Noise rejection* (dp) *Power consumption* (dq) *Size*
 (dr) *Weight* (ds) *Material selection* (dt) *Manufacturing process* (du) *Assembly*
 (dv) *Testing* (dv) *Documentation* (dw) *Compliance* (dx) *Safety* (dy) *Security*
 (dz) *Environmental protection* (ea) *Human factors* (eb) *Ergonomics* (ec) *Accessibility*
 (ed) *Usability* (ee) *Learnability* (ef) *Performance* (eg) *Efficiency* (eh) *Effectiveness*
 (ei) *Reliability* (ej) *Maintainability* (ek) *Flexibility* (el) *Scalability* (em) *Interference rejection*
 (en) *Disturbance rejection* (eo) *Noise rejection* (ep) *Power consumption* (eq) *Size*
 (er) *Weight* (es) *Material selection* (et) *Manufacturing process* (eu) *Assembly*
 (ev) *Testing* (ev) *Documentation* (ew) *Compliance* (ex) *Safety* (ey) *Security*
 (ez) *Environmental protection* (fa) *Human factors* (fb) *Ergonomics* (fc) *Accessibility*
 (fd) *Usability* (fe) *Learnability* (ff) *Performance* (fg) *Efficiency* (fh) *Effectiveness*
 (fi) *Reliability* (fj) *Maintainability* (fk) *Flexibility* (fl) *Scalability* (fm) *Interference rejection*
 (fn) *Disturbance rejection* (fo) *Noise rejection* (fp) *Power consumption* (fq) *Size*
 (fr) *Weight* (fs) *Material selection* (ft) *Manufacturing process* (fu) *Assembly*
 (fv) *Testing* (fv) *Documentation* (fw) *Compliance* (fx) *Safety* (fy) *Security*
 (fz) *Environmental protection* (ga) *Human factors* (gb) *Ergonomics* (gc) *Accessibility*
 (gd) *Usability* (ge) *Learnability* (gf) *Performance* (gg) *Efficiency* (gh) *Effectiveness*
 (gi) *Reliability* (gj) *Maintainability* (gk) *Flexibility* (gl) *Scalability* (gm) *Interference rejection*
 (gn) *Disturbance rejection* (go) *Noise rejection* (gp) *Power consumption* (gq) *Size*
 (gr) *Weight* (gs) *Material selection* (gt) *Manufacturing process* (gu) *Assembly*
 (gv) *Testing* (gv) *Documentation* (gw) *Compliance* (gx) *Safety* (gy) *Security*
 (gz) *Environmental protection* (ha) *Human factors* (hb) *Ergonomics* (hc) *Accessibility*
 (hd) *Usability* (he) *Learnability* (hf) *Performance* (hg) *Efficiency* (hh) *Effectiveness*
 (hi) *Reliability* (hj) *Maintainability* (hk) *Flexibility* (hl) *Scalability* (hm) *Interference rejection*
 (hn) *Disturbance rejection* (ho) *Noise rejection* (hp) *Power consumption* (hq) *Size*
 (hr) *Weight* (hs) *Material selection* (ht) *Manufacturing process* (hu) *Assembly*
 (hv) *Testing* (hv) *Documentation* (hw) *Compliance* (hx) *Safety* (hy) *Security*
 (hz) *Environmental protection* (ia) *Human factors* (ib) *Ergonomics* (ic) *Accessibility*
 (id) *Usability* (ie) *Learnability* (if) *Performance* (ig) *Efficiency* (ih) *Effectiveness*
 (ii) *Reliability* (ij) *Maintainability* (ik) *Flexibility* (il) *Scalability* (im) *Interference rejection*
 (in) *Disturbance rejection* (io) *Noise rejection* (ip) *Power consumption* (iq) *Size*
 (ir) *Weight* (is) *Material selection* (it) *Manufacturing process* (iu) *Assembly*
 (iv) *Testing* (iv) *Documentation* (iw) *Compliance* (ix) *Safety* (iy) *Security*
 (iz) *Environmental protection* (ja) *Human factors* (jb) *Ergonomics* (jc) *Accessibility*
 (jd) *Usability* (je) *Learnability* (jf) *Performance* (jg) *Efficiency* (jh) *Effectiveness*
 (ji) *Reliability* (jj) *Maintainability* (jk) *Flexibility* (jl) *Scalability* (jm) *Interference rejection*
 (jn) *Disturbance rejection* (jo) *Noise rejection* (jp) *Power consumption* (jq) *Size*
 (jr) *Weight* (js) *Material selection* (jt) *Manufacturing process* (ju) *Assembly*
 (kv) *Testing* (kv) *Documentation* (kw) *Compliance* (kx) *Safety* (ky) *Security*
 (kz) *Environmental protection* (la) *Human factors* (lb) *Ergonomics* (lc) *Accessibility*
 (ld) *Usability* (le) *Learnability* (lf) *Performance* (lg) *Efficiency* (lh) *Effectiveness*
 (li) *Reliability* (lj) *Maintainability* (lk) *Flexibility* (ll) *Scalability* (lm) *Interference rejection*
 (ln) *Disturbance rejection* (lo) *Noise rejection* (lp) *Power consumption* (lq) *Size*
 (lr) *Weight* (ls) *Material selection* (lt) *Manufacturing process* (lu) *Assembly*
 (lv) *Testing* (lv) *Documentation* (lw) *Compliance* (lx) *Safety* (ly) *Security*
 (lz) *Environmental protection* (ma) *Human factors* (mb) *Ergonomics* (mc) *Accessibility*
 (md) *Usability* (me) *Learnability* (mf) *Performance* (mg) *Efficiency* (mh) *Effectiveness*
 (mi) *Reliability* (mj) *Maintainability* (mk) *Flexibility* (ml) *Scalability* (mm) *Interference rejection*
 (mn) *Disturbance rejection* (mo) *Noise rejection* (mp) *Power consumption* (mq) *Size*
 (mr) *Weight* (ms) *Material selection* (mt) *Manufacturing process* (mu) *Assembly*<

metaphysic of being has projected solidity to that being: a self separate from an other, a self fully and materially present at a coordinate in space and time. This view has presupposed complete stasis and has been disrupted by the quantum physical perspective of universal momentum. While physics has been of and in the solid plane, its subatomic "objects" have always been in motion.

2.1 Seeing the light

For physics and so-called natural science up until early in the twentieth century the universal constant against which to measure other variables was taken to be light. The speed of light was, and in many scientific endeavours still is, the benchmark against which are measured other physical phenomena including the distance of the sun and other planets from earth in this solar system, the motion of the galaxies in this universe and the reactions and interactions of subatomic particles. The radical change in the scientific approach to light concerned its subatomic manifestation. In the Newtonian scheme light was understood to manifest either as particles or as waves, thought to be mutually exclusive states. According to quantum physics, however, light exists in both states simultaneously. Einstein argued for this dualistic state in his theory of light quanta; De Broglie (a French prince and graduate at the Sorbonne) in his doctoral thesis in 1924 extended Einstein's proposition, arguing that the wave/particle duality is absolutely general, having application to all the physical world. Following De Broglie, the wave/particle duality of light was simply a specific instance of a general state of matter. This seemed preposterous to physicists at the time (McEvoy & Zarate, 1996: 109-15).

Where classical physicists commonly applied their abstractions to the everyday world through visualisation, the apparently quirky behaviour of matter – or matterwaves – led quantum physicists away from that approach into the abstract language of mathematics. It no longer seemed possible to visualise or render real the information they gathered about subatomic phenomena. Werner Heisenberg's radical Uncertainty Principle (HUP) expounded in 1927 was a product of mathematical formalism (McEvoy & Zarate, 1996:131).¹⁴ It was the HUP that finally repudiated the determinism of the Newtonian "clockwork" cosmology. According to the HUP, whether light is found to exist in the particle or wave state is dependent on the intention of the measurer; and under experimental conditions the state the light will take is not predictable. At best the state is a question of probability. No longer could the precise location and speed of a matterwave be predicted, calculated or observed. This means, for example, that an

¹⁴ This recourse to formalism to express new "truths" methodologically links the projects of quantum, Woolf and, by definition, Russian Formalism.

electron in an atom has no definite position, only a range of possible locations, each described by a different state of energy. The theory can give only the probability that the electron is in one of those states. The electron is understood as being not in one place but in all locations at once. It is in a "superposition" of states. It is meaningless to describe the electron's position until a measurement is made. At that point, the measurement destroys the superposition and forces the particle to occupy a definite position.

At the 1927 conference Einstein rejected the HUP, desperately wanting a theory to describe the thing itself, not the probability of its occurrence (McEvoy & Zarate, 1996: 163). The HUP held sway nonetheless, and physicists have suggested there are serious philosophical consequences arising from it (158). To the question, 'what is the relationship between a subatomic particle's wave and particle states?', the answer offered by the HUP was 'probability'. According to quantum physics, probability is the underlying property of all matter. Neils Bohr in 1927 argued that the behaviour of an object as a wave or particle is dependent on the choice of apparatus for investigating it. Hungarian physicist Eugene Wigner has argued that it is the consciousness of the observer that collapses the duality into one or other state. Physicists have not resolved – indeed have tended to avoid – this question, preferring to restrict their investigations to experimentation and leave speculation, rightly, to philosophers (148-60). The uncertainty inherent in probability suggests the element of "choice" about its own state exercisable by the observed. Despite Bohr's and Wigner's speculations, it is an open question whether light itself chooses to manifest in a wave or particle state according to its context.

Granting that an experimenter is not outside the events as a neutral observer but is an integral player in the outcomes of an experiment, it is a logical step to argue that subjects and objects are not separate but are interdependent. The current contention in physics is that 'Quantum mechanics does not permit a separation between the observer and the observed. The [observed] and the observer are part of a single system' (McEvoy & Zarate, 1996: 168). A scientist cannot stand back from the observed light and declare that it is a particle or a wave. The perspective from which they observe implicates their own subjectivity with the subjective state (particle or wave) of the observed. Considered as 'part of a single system', the observer and the observed are intersubjective. The closest term in physics for this seems to be "entanglement". German physicist Erwin Schrodinger coined "entanglement" in the 1930s to describe this process of interconnectedness that can occur at subatomic levels.

Ben Stein describes entanglement in his discussion of an experiment that shows the impact of electrons on phases and polarities of photons (particles of light) as they pass through an ionised atom and emerge "entangled". The degree to which this process has application at other levels seems an open question. Stein points out that not only particles – whether electrons or photons of light – can be entangled. Different properties of the same particle can also be entangled. 'Indeed, in theory, entanglement can create an intimate bond between any quantum systems that have interacted' (Stein, 1996: 27). Physically this means that any kind of measurement performed on one of the systems has an effect on the other even if a large distance separates them. Particles can be in the same state across vast distances:

for a pair of quantum particles even a brief encounter can create a mutual telepathic bond. Before being measured, both particles are in a fuzzy, undefined state, yet they still have a special relationship. When the state of one is measured, the state of the other is instantly defined-even if it is halfway across the universe. (27)

This physical model describes, at least metaphorically, how systems such as sex/gender work oppositionally: "measuring" masculinity defines femininity and the alteration of one state effects the other. When Einstein and two other physicists in the 1930s developed the EPR paradox to try to refute the implications of the Uncertainty Principle their efforts were deemed naïve. For Einstein 'underlying quantum theory, there had to be a world in which a particle's properties – such as momentum and position – had real, preexisting values'. In the EPR paradox Einstein argued that the tie which binds entangled particles was a physical impossibility because it appeared to act simultaneously, and no known influence could travel faster than the speed of light. He dubbed it "spooky action at a distance". It could well be that here Einstein was balking at coming face to face with the workings of consciousness. Could conscious choosing, the action of subjective agency, be the unknown "influence" that travels faster than the speed of light, entangling elements of a system as large as our universe?

In the context of postmodernity's contribution to metaphors of selfhood – in terms of flow and process – our disciplines have the same problem of tracking a self/identity *in process*. Although the objects of science and maths seem worlds away from the objects and subjects of humanities, and specifically literary and cultural studies, the intellectual domains intersect in their ways of knowing their objects. Quantum physics is useful to the work in humanities in particular for the way it recognises the limitations of hitherto naturalised subject-object relations in modes of knowing. In contrast to the assumption that an object can be known by a subject, it recognises that the subject and object are

better understood as interrelated, in the process of the investigation, and are better described as intersubjective. The significance for gender dimorphism in the shift from measuring the material (particle) state of things to discerning the (wave) states of process is one of perspective: when we look for gender we fix it in place. Analyses in the humanities must extend beyond the circular efforts of identity politics, for example, of the "strategic" identities approach, if we are to account better for the kind of subjectivities that are produced when they are understood as impermanent. Understood by physics now as existing in waves and particles simultaneously, light can signify equivalence or ambivalence instead of a linear logic that generates a hierarchy of meanings. It can represent an ambivalence that generates plural and conflicting "truths": a "yes and" to replace an "either/or" logic.

The benefit of engaging with quantum thought on states of existence at the subatomic level is its consideration of the interface between matter and energy. At the microscopic level, "things" as we might normally regard them, are never just "things" and they can be encountered as matter and movement. From here we could imagine how a politics of the subject might no longer proceed from the certainty of designation. An emancipatory politics might not insist for its credibility on the truth of distinct and discretely identified subjects. The subject comprises a mind that has no space-time boundaries in a body that apparently does, and both are mediated through signs. The experience of the self as separate from the universe, as discrete and whole, is refuted at the subatomic level by quantum physics. Einstein famously described it as 'a kind of optical illusion of [human] consciousness' (Stein, 1996: 28). It is probable that a shift in perspective away from the reliability of signs toward the uncertainty of experience allows radical expressions of subjectivity. The materialism that has come to prevail in debates around gender and sexuality fixes sites for gendered and sexed subjectivity. While materialist critiques can take on a sophisticated analysis of representation, the materiality of the subject predominates in such critiques. But the subject is always a representation, and so analyses of the subject are questions of and for interpretation. The desire to draw a politics from materialist analysis leads to unarticulated assumptions about experiential truths. The subject is in a sense an object insofar as representations are always a record, a commemoration of the subject. Representations are not the subject itself. The time of the subject is the past tense, textually. The time of the experiencing being is the present. Conflation of the linguistic and the ontological subject confuses the point of the analysis. A politics of the subject implicitly includes an ontological sense of subject, despite protestations that the focus is semiotic. Whatever their respective motivations and politics, it is this problem that links the moment of Einstein's relativity (1915), the modernist processing of this newer

understanding of universal momentum as undecidable – in Heisenberg's term, "uncertain" – and Woolf's exploration of subjectivity through modernist formal experimentation.

CONCLUSION

The terms subjectivity and objectivity encode the very perspectivalness that generates them. Subjectivity is internal, biased, coloured; objectivity is external, observable, knowable. Subject-object relations map the sense that the subject experiences its self as multiple, not always coherent, in motion, and seeks to settle itself through knowing the totality (and thus reduced scope) of the other. The other's finiteness ensures the safety of the subject's borders (experienced as insecure). Where the subject no longer fears its indefinability and thus has no need for policing (discerning, describing) the borders of the other, intersubjectivity is enabled. Subject-object relations are no more an inevitability of culture than are the discrete distinctions of gender, sexual or other borders. The discourses that currently sway the direction of gender analysis argue for an indeterminacy that they cannot effect, insofar as they hold onto the truth of subject-object relations (arguments for the transgressiveness of s/m are a single instance). The other is object only when the subject implicitly or explicitly needs to reduce the object's impact, contain its influence, establish distinct separateness. The model of subject-object does not capture the processes by which subjects move through separateness and connection in constant flux. Without the fear of contamination, or even, relation, with the other, there is room for a perspective of intersubjectivity, where each subject can recognise themselves as open-ended/frayed, interarticulated, in motion, rippling through and across each other rather than bouncing off each other's walls. These relations do not describe desire in its narrow sense but subjects in transaction with each other. In the next chapter I discuss how *Orlando* re-inscribes the momentum of the subject. The uncertainty characteristic of its moment-to-moment articulations and forms of consciousness, is central to Woolf's aesthetic and is deployed to emancipate the desiring subject from the predeterminations of convention, the ground zero of which is the sex/gender system.

5 DELUSIONS OF GENDER: *ORLANDO*'S RECEPTION

it is an open question in what sense Orlando can be said to have existed at the present moment
(Woolf, 1928: 293)

The force of experience provides the frame for my analysis of *Orlando* and of the text's reception by some of Woolf's influential contemporaries. In Chapter 1 I argued for a reconsideration of "experience" within subjective agency, and in Chapter 4 I proceeded to shape experience in terms of intersubjectivity and undecidability. I work with experience as a nonessential moment-to-moment consciousness – the agent of subjective agency. With that notion of experience in mind I recall here the childhood drama in the park, related in the Introduction. The interrogation of my selfhood by the question 'are you a boy or a girl?' – in the face of my "experience" of selfhood as otherwise – was motivated by the same insecurities as the question often posed by critics about *Orlando*: 'is it serious or a joke?' A boy or a girl, serious or a joke: these questions, prompted in both cases by undecidability around gender and conventions of identity, represent the cultural blank stare in the face of the unintelligible.

The anxiety evident in some modernist receptions, around *Orlando*'s status as serious literature or a joke, provides an apt entry into analysis of the impact of the text's aesthetics. The pompous metaphysical certainty brought to the text by an unacknowledged convention of criticism, and the values implicit within that position, were precisely what was under question in the text. *Orlando* refuses to yield its intelligibility to unilateral subject-object interpretation. To get the measure of the text, which was the objective of most of its contemporary critics, required relinquishing the objectivist and hierarchical posturing that formed the basis of many critics' cultural standing. With their authority suspended by the text, the intelligible position for the critic is intersubjective. To refuse the text's propositions by dismissing it as a joke betrays an investment in the structures skilfully revealed as delusory in the text. At the

beginning of a century beset with anxiety over the destabilisation of centralised authority, and in a context where competing theories of being and selfhood were generating rampant quests for stabilised identification, *Orlando* was revelling in the expressive possibilities and liberations enabled by such uncertainty.

To critique Woolf's text in 1928 meant a *de facto* declaration of one's relationship to the power of certainty in a time of the rise of quantum uncertainty. To read the text now requires no less. There have been radical reconsiderations of subjectivity across the twentieth century, most evident in the discourses of postmodernism and poststructuralism. Theories of the subject no longer imagine a discrete and materially integrated centre for their analyses. Such shifts in thinking about the subject have been incomplete in practice, however. The practice of acknowledging the subject as a process in flux, and then resorting to "strategic" identifications to continue to place the subject in a centre of discourse, is a common but ineffective solution to the genuine difficulties of working with uncertainty. It is not sufficient to describe subjectivity in fluid terms and yet to treat the subject as a stable material reality. My reconception of subjectivity in relation to space and experience contests this practice. If space is conventionally a system of reference for, and a backdrop to, materiality, then space can be reclaimed for a non-material conception of subjectivity as the potentiality or agency of the subject. Turning to *Orlando* I pursue this angle, in particular as I see it expressed through the tension between the characters of the biographer and of Orlando in the text's final chapter.

1 *ORLANDO: a biography*

Orlando chronicles the history of a character who lives across four centuries (c16th - 20th) and whose sex, gender, and pronoun change in the course of the narrative. Fully titled *Orlando: a biography*, the choice of biography as the genre for relating an obviously fictional life establishes the framework for the text's subversiveness. In its particular deployment of a genre which inevitably fictionalises the subject it purports merely to reveal, the text dramatises the instability of the relationship between words and things. The title instructs the reader on their strategy for engaging with the text. To read the text as biography activates the critique encoded in its form; to read it as decontextualised fantasy disempowers the critique. This non-representational biography is less about Orlando as a subject than about the processes of subjective formation through which Orlando acquires subjective agency. The ironised third person narrator in *Orlando* models for its readers the witnessing of subject formation; the interpellation of witnesses which (as discussed in Chapter 2) Sedgwick has said

invests the performative with its force. The sex and gender distortion in the text is not heralded as queer or subversive. It is given. It is performed within the literary convention of the biographer, that authorises its significance.¹

In addition to the narrative device of the "biographer", Woolf critiques conventions of representation, and of being, at several compositional levels in the text. She fabricates across historical periods – literally turns into the fabric of their time – conventions of literature, style and manners. Thus the patriarchal interests of Romanticism and a strict division of gender are fabricated into the wet, obfuscating fog that descends on England at the close of the eighteenth century:

The great cloud which hung, not only over London, but over the whole of the British Isles on the first day of the nineteenth century stayed ... long enough to have extraordinary consequences upon those who lived beneath its shadow. (Woolf, 1928: 217)

Dampness crept through everything, 'the sexes drew further and further apart', 'The life of the average woman was a succession of childbirths':

Thus the British Empire came into existence; and thus – for there is no stopping damp; it gets into the inkpot as it gets into the woodwork – sentences swelled, adjectives multiplied, lyrics became epics, and little trifles that had been essays a column long were now encyclopaedias in ten or twenty volumes. (219)

As a consequence Orlando writes, in a neat Italian hand, 'the most insipid verse she had ever read in her life'; the 'involuntary inspiration' a result of the damp (227).

A subversive disinterest in the facts of Orlando's public life as a man and diplomat – Ambassador Extraordinaire to Constantinople – materialises as an unfortunate loss of documentation:

Often the paper was scorched a deep brown in the middle of the most important sentence. Just when we thought to elucidate a secret that has puzzled historians for a hundred years, there was a hole in the manuscript big enough to put your finger through. (115)

¹ Contrast this with more mainstream versions of man-to-woman drag which announce their status as masquerade, and thus also the impossibility of their desired referent. This kind of drag recuperates masculinity in performing a refusal of it. Frederic Jameson's early 1980s formulation of parody is still relevant here. For Jameson (1980), parody (drag, in my example,) implies the truth which mobilises it as parody, whereas pastiche takes no position on the cultural codes which it defamiliarises; rather, its position is defamiliarisation. Whereas parody reinforces a truth, pastiche cannibalises truth. By this definition *Orlando* is pastiche.

The text parodies the materiality of things and the guarantee of truth attributed to the phenomenological and scientifically valid thereness of the object material world. The overdrawn extension of the metaphor of dampness into the literal world of nineteenth-century objects materialising in literary conventions, so that 'sentences swelled', and the critique of the recording of masculine public life materialising as a 'hole in the manuscript', are two specific instances of a general thread throughout the first five chapters of the text.

Uncertainty as the organising principle of the text is signalled from the opening sentence: 'He – for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it...'. This signals that pronouns and clothes and subjectivity are not to be congruent in this text about a boy who becomes a woman without rupturing agential subjectivity through the change.

The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity. Their faces remained, as their portraits prove, practically the same... His memory – but in future we must, for convention's sake, say "her" for "his" and "she" for "he" – her memory then, went back through all the events of her past life without encountering any obstacles.
(133)

Thus the exposure as mere convention of conventions of biography and gender, works through the text to destabilise the subsets of conventions within those fields. Woolf's play with conventions works through sustained layering to disarticulate the mind of Orlando from the conventions that would define Orlando. As the mind has no essential identity beyond its material projections, Woolf's deployment of subjective agency in *Orlando* can be understood as an action of mind. Orlando's subjectivity lies not in the aggregate of reading conventions that render "her" intelligible through the lens of pronouns, gender, sex/uality, class, ethnicity. Orlando's subjectivity is instead, as the final chapter of the novel reveals, a process of mind interacting with its contexts and unavailable as an object for analysis according to the convention of the biographer and "his" readership. My reading of *Orlando* below follows the narrative chronologically in order to elaborate on the text's progress toward the present moment of the subject. I begin with an analysis of how the text gestures to its desired reader.

1.1 "Pleasure in Understanding": *Orlando's* Reader

Through the voice of the biographer/narrator, by turns straight or ironic, Woolf postulates the ideal reader for the text; a reader that coincides with the reader

postulated by Jauss; a reader whose pleasure is aroused in understanding and becoming intersubjective with the "other".

For though these are not matters on which a biographer can profitably enlarge it is plain enough to those who have done a reader's part in making up from bare hints dropped here and there the whole boundary and circumference of the living person; can hear in what we only whisper a living voice; can see, often when we say nothing about it, exactly what he looked like; know without a word to guide them precisely what he thought – and it is for readers such as these that we write. (70)

Though written by the unreliable narrator biographer this description is sufficiently at odds with the reader addressed elsewhere by the narrator (a reader who is to be convinced by facts and evidence alone), to suggest that this is indeed the reader for whom Woolf writes. While a reader who can 'know without a word to guide them' sounds like a reader who simply makes things up – superimposes their view in a subject-object model – the key here lies in Woolf's suggestion that the reader can work comfortably with uncertainty; can discern from 'bare hints' and hear comprehensiveness in a whisper. It is an active and intersubjective process. This is the strategy Woolf invites for reading, through the shifting and duplicitous signs of cultural convention, the present-moment agency of a subject not saturated by those conventions.

Much later in the text the intersubjective relationship is described more directly in the language of seduction. Having received two hundred guineas from 'old Greene' for her poem "The Oak Tree", Orlando ponders the irrelevance of 'praise and fame' to poetry. Disconnecting the material value from the intersubjective value of the process, she ponders:

Was not writing poetry a secret transaction, a voice answering a voice? So that all this chatter and praise and blame and meeting people who admired one and meeting people who did not admire one was as ill suited as could be to the thing itself – a voice answering a voice. What could have been more secret, she thought, more slow, and like the intercourse of lovers, than the stammering answer she had made all these years...? (310)

The voice is the narrator biographer's and Orlando's 'stammering answer' is to the land about which she wrote; and yet Woolf's own critique of the pomp around literary awards is clearly present in Orlando's reflection. In Bowlby's edition the note for this section refers to Woolf's contempt for the context of the award given to Vita by Edmund Gosse for her poem 'The Land' (Woolf, 1928: 339). Embedded in this parody

of the "literary middle class" (note, 339) is a description of the motivation for writing that exceeds the parody: writing was 'a secret transaction, a voice answering a voice', a 'stammering answer', 'secret...slow...like the intercourse of lovers'. Dedicated to Vita, Woolf's intersubjective aesthetic could hardly be more direct in this version of "pleasure in understanding".

If reading for Woolf and Jauss involves "pleasure in understanding", then the desiring dynamic in the text is surely a challenge to the heterosexual "truth" that defines the sex/gender system. When Orlando's body changes from male to female the desire that does not bother to speak its name in the text steps in to replace Orlando's presumed heterosexuality. Returning to England as a woman, Orlando contemplates the implications of her change. When a sailor falls to his near death from a masthead after glimpsing her ankles, Orlando concludes that it is better to be a woman than a man; better to renounce the "manly desires", 'martial ambition, the love of power' in favour of 'the most exalted rapture known to the human spirit ... contemplation, solitude, love' (154). At the word "love", she cries 'Praise God that I'm a woman!' and the word "love" recalls Sasha to her mind:

And as all Orlando's loves had been women, now, through the culpable laggardry of the human frame to adapt itself to convention, though she herself was a woman, it was still a woman she loved; and if the consciousness of being of the same sex had any effect at all, it was to quicken and deepen those feelings which she had had as a man ... this affection gained in beauty what it lost in falsity. At last, she cried, she knew Sasha as she was, and in the ardour of this discovery, and in the pursuit of all those treasures which were now revealed, she was so rapt and enchanted that it was as if a canon ball had exploded at her ear when a man's voice said, 'Permit me, Madam' ... (155)

Rather than presenting a conundrum to Orlando and reader alike, the change of sex (and as a consequence of convention, the change of gender), allows Orlando to 'Praise God' that she's a woman, to 'quicken and deepen' the feelings of desire for women that she had as a man, and to stand 'rapt and enchanted' at this discovery. A reader's "pleasure in understanding" the desire that is here articulated playfully and unambiguously, connects them to a same-sex sensibility that many of the novel's contemporary critics, discussed below, found too confronting to acknowledge and had to turn into a joke.

In the process of "pleasure in understanding", the importance of understanding, and the inadequacy of pleasure alone in an intersubjective model, is explored through

Orlando's return to England as a woman. Her undeniable pleasure at being a woman who desires women is tempered by the cultural impositions against her gender and her desire: 'But now Orlando was to learn how little the most tempestuous flutter of excitement avails against the iron countenance of the law' (160-61). She arrives to find three lawsuits against her pertaining to her sex change and its implications for her property rights. The charges read:

(1) that she was dead, and therefore could not hold any property whatsoever; (2) that she was a woman, which amounts to much the same thing; (3) that she was an English Duke who had married one Rosina Pepita, a dancer; and had had by her three sons, which sons now declaring that their father was deceased, claimed that all his property descended to them. (161)

Pending the judgement Orlando returns to her country seat 'in a highly ambiguous condition, uncertain whether she was alive or dead, man or woman, Duke or nonentity', having the Law's permission 'to reside in a state of incognito or incognita, as the case might turn out to be' (161). Woolf dramatises here the intricate relationship of gender conventions and the Law. Gender conventions underlie those other conventions (of literature, the establishment, time) that Woolf parodies and which exist in a feedback loop with the Law. Material, proprietary interests drive the Law to define subjects according to gender. From Woolf's perspective in this chapter of *Orlando*, the effects of a materialist critique of gender (in queer self-avowal, in assertions of 'difference feminism') can have no real traction on the larger ground of authority and its control of meaning. This is why the text offers instead a non-materialist (but also a non-idealist and non-transcendentalist) practice of subjectivity. Orlando in the final chapter of the novel models an act of subjective agency that itself constitutes the critique of and turn from the sex/gender system. *Orlando* confronts the sex/gender system, reveals the limitations of materialist critique and proceeds toward subjective agency as a mode for outsmarting that system.

1.2 Gender and Desire

Orlando and her biographer speculate frequently about her gender ambiguity – her state of incognito and incognita – yet her sexuality throughout is determined not by her gender/sex but by the object of her desire. The dedication makes plain that the text is driven by desire for women. As a boy, a man and a woman, Orlando desires women. Orlando's desire is represented as the least problematic element of the "change". The easy disarticulation of desire from sexed identity is played with often in the text, particularly in the cases of Archduke Harry/Archduchess Harriet and Marmaduke

Bonthorp Shelmerdine, Esquire. Harry, a man, had fallen for Orlando as a boy and dressed as a woman to attract Orlando. After the "change" Harry comes out as a man and presses Orlando for marriage on several occasions. When Shel, a man, and Orlando, as a woman, declare their love, each infers the other's gender on the basis of their own desire. In an ironic reversal which starts from the position of their avowedly same-sex desire, Shel takes Orlando for a man; Orlando takes Shel for a woman. The incongruity of the queer couple marrying makes sense when their referents are Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson, and when the context for their marriage is the blinding and oppressive fog of Victorian England where the desire for marriage is naturalised in the text as an itch for a ring, and where marriage performs the heightened role of literary closure.

The subject of far more speculation, both contradictory and absurd, by the biographer is the relationship of Orlando's subjectivity to external signs of gender. The biographer refers the reader to the changes in Orlando's behaviour as a woman. She begins to hide her manuscript when interrupted (169, 179), and becomes

a little more modest, as women are, of her brains, and a little more vain, as women are, of her person. Certain susceptibilities were asserting themselves, and others were diminishing. The change of clothes had, some philosophers will say, much to do with it. (179)

Speaking as if to endorse those views of "some philosophers" the biographer summarises:

Thus, there is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them; we make them take to the mould of arm or breast, but they mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking. (180)

Comparing the photographic "evidence" of Orlando as a man and as a woman (made possible by the striking and fortuitous similarity between Vita Sackville-West in plate 5 and her ancestor in plate 4, represented as 'Orlando as Ambassador') the biographer allows that 'Had they both worn the same clothes, it is possible that their outlook might have been the same' (180). Turning from that view, attributed to 'some philosophers and wise ones' (180) the biographer then asserts a profound depth to the difference between the sexes. This leads to a dilemma:

Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above. (181)

The contradictory speculations suspend access to Orlando and work as a nonsensical anthropological dialogue between the biographer and imputed reader. It is only when the biographer returns to the position of Orlando's gender as undecidable that Orlando re-enters the narrative: 'Whether, then, Orlando was most man or woman, it is difficult to say and cannot now be decided. For her coach was now rattling on the cobbles' (192).

Though Orlando's desire is not a source of textual anxiety, the difficulty of representing women's desire is illustrated when Orlando as a woman cross-dresses and takes to the streets of London during the reign of Queen Anne, engaging Nell the prostitute for sex. When Orlando reveals herself a woman, Nell drops her simpering behaviours 'put on to gratify [Orlando's] masculinity'. In the company of Nell, Prue, Kitty and Rose, Orlando discovers that, like the society of wits she was coming to reject ('deeply though she must continue to respect their works') (209), they too had 'a society of their own' (209). The biographer however dramatises why "he" cannot represent what it is that women do when together. Though the biographer has dramatised earlier a lack of access to Orlando when a man, due to holes in the evidence, this exclusion of the biographer has greater significance for the text's aesthetics, and it prefigures the later shift where the biographer loses control over Orlando's subjectivity.

For it cannot be denied that when women get together – but hist – they are always careful to see that the doors are shut and that not a word of it gets into print. All they desire is –but hist again – is that not a man's step on the stair? (210)

Closed off from the society of women, one strategy men have adopted is denial that women bother to get together without them, or denial of the possibility of desire in that scene. The step on the stair is a man approaching to buy sex:

All they desire, we were about to say when the gentleman took the very words out of our mouths. Women have no desires, says this gentleman, coming into Nell's parlour; only affectations. Without desires (she has served him and he is gone) their conversation cannot be of the slightest interest to anyone. (210)

The scene pinpoints the economic basis for the free expression of desire. In that scenario women are paid not to express, but to satisfy, desire. Woolf carvasses in this scene, and in the property dispute, the material realities of the sex/gender system. Her answer to this is her representation of Orlando's subjectivity in the novel's final chapter. The Nell scene closes with the biographer claiming 'the immunity of all biographers and historians from any sex whatsoever' in "his" refusal to engage the question further. He opts to 'merely state that Orlando professed great enjoyment in the society of her own sex, and leave it to the gentlemen to prove, as they are very fond of doing, that this is impossible' (210). The voice of objectivity, immune from sex, is of course subverted by the account that follows of Orlando spending a pleasurable season changing clothes from a woman's to a man's to suit the occasion, and enjoying 'the love of both sexes equally' (211). Again obliterating the discourses *about* "her" desire, Orlando's actual desire drives the narrative.

Having established through the foil of the biographer the delineations of desire in the narrative, extending to address and include the reader, Woolf then pits the free play with gender conventions against the socio-material imperatives of Victorian England. Here subjectivity is drawn humorously but also hair-raisingly as a careful negotiation between desire and social, material and legal forces.

1.3 Marriage and the Spirit of the Age

The ambiguities allowed Orlando during the Enlightenment period are compelled toward certainty as the spirit of the nineteenth century 'took her and broke her' (232). With the sexes drawn further apart Orlando begins to consider a desperate remedy, 'to yield completely and submissively to the spirit of the age, and take a husband', even though this is 'much against her natural temperament' (232). In this chapter Orlando nearly loses subjective agency completely. When she apostrophises the clouds, 'Whom ... can I lean upon?', the biographer notes, 'It was not Orlando who spoke, but the spirit of the age' (235). Becoming engaged to Shel minutes after he rescues her from a fall, Orlando's femininity is fixed in place. She begins to use intuition, pressures Shel into boasts of his adventures, sheds tears and, as a consequence of her behaviours: "'I am a woman", she thought, "a real woman at last"' (240-41). As if there were any doubt the Law re-enters with a settlement of her suits.

'Sex? Ah! What about sex? My sex', she read out with some solemnity, 'is pronounced indisputably, and beyond the shadow of a doubt (what I was telling you a moment ago, Shel?), female. The estates which are now desequestrated in perpetuity descend and are tailed and entailed upon the heirs male of my body, or in default of marriage' – but here she

grew impatient with this legal verbiage, and said, 'but there won't be any default of marriage, nor of heirs either, so the rest can be taken as read'. (243)

'Taken as read' here has a double sense. Orlando's referent (Vita) was married and had sons, though the Knole property passed to her male cousin (one of the plausible referents for Shel). But the rest is 'taken as read' also because the reader of nineteenth-century fiction knows that marriage is the inevitable literary climax.²

Though central to Orlando's identity in this chapter, the marriage is given perfunctory treatment, squeezed in before Shel races off to his adventures. Words have become material in the nineteenth century, so that Orlando's words 'went shooting' and 'struck [Shel] where he sat' (248). Yet the word central to the marriage ceremony is obliterated: 'and then all was quiet for a moment, and one word – it might be 'the jaws of death' – rang out clear ... and now there was a clap of thunder, so that no one heard the word Obey spoken...'. The critique of materialism emerges powerfully here. The material truths of a time are subtended by the unspeakable truths, Foucault's cultural archives, which project materiality. The material truths of the marriage ceremony, for example, celebrate romantic love, continuity of naturalised tradition, and a happy ending. The unspeakable truths are of the unequal economic and sexual contracts that define marriage as a transmission of patriarchal power and property. Though the word "Obey" was (and possibly still is) clearly articulated in the marriage ceremony, the power of taboo – represented by the clap of thunder – prevents its implications materialising in the celebrational context of social ritual. Literally "immaterial" in the ceremony, the word "Obey" works its powerful effects silently through the 'spirit of the age'. As Shel and Orlando cry out each other's names, 'the words went dashing and circling like wild hawks together among the belfries and higher and higher, further and further, faster and faster they circled, till they crashed and fell in a shower of fragments to the ground' (250). A frenzied climax to the marriage, the materialist investments of the institution of marriage manifest in the conjoined names. But the absurdity of taking words for things plays out in their brittle demise. Materiality falls short of its mark, and Orlando retreats inside.

² Sally Potter's camp film adaptation of *Orlando* (1992) offers its own antimaterialist solution to the text's inheritance dispute, rejecting the imperative, for patriarchal property transmission, of marriage and heir-production. Orlando does not marry, gives birth to a daughter rather than a son, and loses Knole. Thus a model of feminine desire (the mother-daughter dyad) replaces patriarchal transmission. Signs of freedom from patriarchal identifications have replaced what has been lost materially. Orlando and her daughter are seen enjoying new twentieth-century freedoms, indexed by their unisex clothes, their speed and mobility (Orlando rides a motorbike with her daughter in the sidecar), and freedom to narrate their own lives (Orlando's publication, her daughter's use of the video camera to capture Orlando in the final frames); and the 'spirit of the age' (a queer angel played by Jimmy Somerville ascending in song to herald the credits) is for, not against, her.

The register shifts dramatically in the final chapter from the parody of materiality to an ambivalence about the 'human spirit', as Orlando emerges from her oppression by the 'spirit of the age' of the nineteenth century.³ This is played out initially in the tension between writing (poetry) and being written (by the 'spirit of the age', by the marriage ceremony, by the convention of biography). Though Orlando had passed through the obligatory marriage she begins to doubt its ability to confer selfhood.

She was certainly feeling more herself. Her finger had not tingled once, or nothing to count, since that night on the moor. Yet, she could not deny that she had her doubts. She was married, true; but if one's husband was always sailing around Cape Horn, was it marriage? If one liked him, was it marriage? If one liked other people, was it marriage? And finally, if one still wished, more than anything in the whole world, to write poetry, was it marriage? She had her doubts. (252)

To put to the test the capacity of marriage to confer selfhood, Orlando resolves to return to writing poetry.

She looked at the ring. She looked at the ink pot. Did she dare? No, she did not. But she must. No, she could not. What should she do then? Faint, if possible. But she had never felt better in her life.

'Hang it all!' she cried, with a touch of her old spirit. 'Here goes!'

And she plunged her pen neck deep in the ink. To her enormous surprise, there was no explosion. She drew the nib out. It was wet, but not dripping. She wrote. (252)

'Wet, but not dripping', Orlando's instrument for writing is free from the damp excesses of the fecund age of Victoria. But the oppressive 'spirit of the age' lingers in the form of Woolf's censorious 'angel in the house'.

As she wrote she felt some power (remember we are dealing with the most obscure manifestations of the human spirit) reading over her shoulder, and when she had written

³ Johnson (1994) argues that Woolf's reference to 'the spirit of the age' is a device for articulating ideas in psychological and psychical research that were an influence upon the Bloomsbury group. Johnson argues that second wave psychology provoked a paradigm shift in psychology by positing a mind in motion, in contrast to the first wave's mechanistic view of mind. He cites Woolf's (1924) 'Character in Fiction' paper in which she describes the 'spirit of the age' as a 'mysterious power' which is 'taking us by the hand ... and making us look much more closely into the reasons why people do and say and think things'. Canvassing the radical ideas of second wave psychology and psychical research in the early twentieth century, Johnson suggests that these influences 'helped her to avoid the limitations of the materialist's realism by providing some of the raw materials for her complex exploration of deeper psychic realities' (1994: 160).

'Egyptian girls', the power told her to stop... – girls? Are girls necessary? You have a husband at the Cape, you say? Ah, well, that'll do.

And so the spirit passed on.

Orlando now performed in spirit (for all this took place in spirit) a deep obeisance to the spirit of her age, such as – to compare great things with small – a traveller, conscious that he has a bundle of cigars in the corner of his suit case, makes to the customs officer who has obligingly made a scribble of white chalk on the lid. For she was extremely doubtful whether, if the spirit had examined the contents of her mind carefully, it would not have found something highly contraband for which she would have to pay the full fine. (253)

Haunted by the spirit of the age to refrain from waxing lyrical, as a married woman, about 'Egyptian girls' (still eroticised in her memory from her time as a man), Orlando considers the narrow escape she has had from having to 'pay the full fine' to the spirit of her age for the 'highly contraband' contents of her mind. Here Woolf contrasts with irony a "great" thing, Orlando's obeisance to the spirit of the age, against the "small" matter of psychological censorship, in the metaphor of the conscious mind acting as customs officer regarding contents travelling between the subconscious and conscious mind. It is a moment of rebellion in the text where form is observed – Orlando's obeisance to homophobia and compulsory marriage – yet agency has its way and the contraband desire slips through with a nod and a wink to the customs officer. Managing to marry has worked as a safe cover from which to write her desire,

for the transaction between a writer and the spirit of the age is one of infinite delicacy, and upon a nice arrangement between the two the whole fortune of his works depends. Orlando had so ordered it that she was in an extremely happy position; she need neither fight her age, nor submit to it; she was of it, yet remained herself. Now therefore she could write, and write she did. She wrote. She wrote. She wrote. (254)

It is from this carefully negotiated position, having freed herself from the oppression of the previous century, being of this new age, yet remaining "herself", that Orlando begins to slip from the grasp of the biographer and to write "herself" through the process of intersubjectivity. The life of action, to which the biographer and "his" traditions are habituated, is overtaken by the life of the mind.

1.4 Losing the Subject

This transition is made possible through the expansion of time in the text by space. As time expands to embrace the moment-to-moment detail of Orlando's thoughts, the

biographer's role is displaced onto passive observation. Orlando writes and thinks, and the biographer laments:

What is more irritating than to see one's subject, on whom one has lavished so much time and trouble, slipping out of one's grasp altogether and indulging – witness her sighs and gasps, her flushing, her palings, her eyes now bright as lamps, now haggard as dawns – what is more humiliating than to see all this dumb show of emotion and excitement gone through before our eyes when we know that what causes it – thought and imagination – are of no importance whatsoever? (255-56)

The 'show of emotion and excitement' is described as "dumb" by the biographer here because "he" and "his" conventions have no language to articulate it, nor ears to hear it. The 'emotion and excitement' caused by 'thought and imagination' are not intelligible to the conventions Woolf critiques throughout the narrative; they are intelligible as functions of Orlando's agency, and find expression through the expansion of Orlando's mind as it fills the final chapter of the text. The biographer concedes that when writing the life of a woman, "we may, it is agreed, waive our demand for action, and substitute love instead" (256) and canvasses a range of conventional attitudes about women that Woolf had critiqued in *A Room of One's Own*; such as "as long as she thinks of a man, nobody objects to a woman thinking" and "as long as she writes little notes nobody objects to a woman writing either" (256). But, as it happens, Orlando was not writing love notes to men. The biographer concludes, "If then, the subject of one's biography will neither love nor kill, but will only think and imagine, we may conclude that he or she is no better than a corpse and so leave her" (257).

Leaving Orlando, the biographer lapses into a mock plain verse inquiry of nature about what life is (echoing the authority tradition: 'ly accorded lyric or epic form regarding the topic of life), to conclude two pages later, "alas, we don't know" (259). The "life" of the subject is shown beyond the reach of the biographer. This is not simply a modernist lament that words cannot contain their referents; that words are not things. A refusal to submit to the logics of conventional subjectivity is not a falling short here. It is a radical act of creativity. Here Woolf's aesthetic emerges as a celebration of the self-determining subjectivity of lesbian desire in the text. Lesbian desire is not a defined quantity here so much as a qualitative agency. It acquires subjectivity not for the purpose of intelligibility to others but for itself in relation to its own desire. The "life" of the subject is not the province of literary or cultural convention; it is the province of the subject's agency. From here the biographer and Orlando have separate "lives", the biographer continuing "his" role in form alone, for the continuance of the

narrative. "His" voice continues the narrative but Orlando's mental state dictates the terms and tone of the character's unfolding. This question about life, thought and writing marks the beginning of Orlando's withdrawal from the biographer's narrative and her acquisition of the power to write herself.

Only when Orlando finishes writing can the biographer step back in "just in time to save the book from extinction" (259). Orlando has finished her four-hundred-year old manuscript. Here the intersubjective cast of Orlando's subjectivity is indexed through her writing.

The manuscript which reposed above her heart began shuffling and beating as if it were a living thing, and, what was still odder, and showed how fine a sympathy was between them, Orlando, by inclining her head, could make out what it was that it was saying. It wanted to be read. It must be read. It would die in her bosom if it were not read... Human beings had become necessary. (260)

The desire written into Orlando's text – accounting for the "fine sympathy between them" – requires relief in the form of a reader. Through the register of irony, whereby the poem is a suffering "being, who, though not herself, yet entirely depended on her" (260) the text sexualises the relationship between reader and text. Orlando's poem is suffering for lack of "pleasure in understanding" and the parallel between Orlando's poem and Woolf's *Orlando* is obvious. Orlando wonders whether in fashionable Mayfair her poem would be "relieved of its desire" (261) and finds support from the now disappointingly respectable Nick Greene who takes it to be published. Gaining the impression from Greene and the critics of Orlando's (and just preceding Woolf's) day that "one must never, never say what one thought ... one must always, always write like somebody else", Orlando raises again the question of subjectivity. 'Life? Literature? One to be made into the other? But how monstrously difficult!' (272). Orlando's meditations on this question cannot be read simply as parodies of Vita Sackville-West's landed-gentry literary naivete. Woolf's jabs at her contemporaries and the defunct world of Edwardian literature are projected through the screen of Orlando's character; and the persistence of the question about writing life into literature sustains the problematic Woolf works with to write her desire for, and to write the life of, Vita Sackville-West. Thus Woolf problematises the enterprise in order to carry it out and to yield the power of subjective agency to Orlando.

What matters most to Orlando generates the next part of the narrative. Her agency is drawn as consisting in that which lies beyond the conventional self, in qualities of consciousness beyond the conditioned; in ecstasy.

1.5 Ecstasy v Reproduction

The biographer asserts (above) that thought and imagination are of no importance whatsoever. The narrative routinely refutes this, however, specifically in the Serpentine scene where for Orlando the products of thought and imagination are at the very core of what matters. After being plunged into the depths of despair by Nick Greene's article, and having sought refuge in the imaginative overlay of the toy boat floating across the Serpentine river, Orlando experiences ecstasy as the boat (representing Shel's) made a safe passage. She cries 'that's what it is – a toy boat on the Serpentine, ecstasy – it's ecstasy that matters' (274). Directly contrasted to the pettiness and conformity of the critics ('one must never, never say what one thought...one must always, always write like somebody else': 272) Orlando's ecstasy sets the terms for the remaining narrative. "Ecstasy" here indexes Jauss's "pleasure in understanding". "Ecstasy" is a stronger claim than the relatively modest "pleasure in understanding" but here Woolf may offer it as a necessary precondition for intersubjectivity.⁴ "Ecstasy" encodes Woolf's aesthetic of the mind beyond its material platform (a body sexed, gendered and policed by convention). What matters is beyond matter. "Ecstasy" exceeds conventional categories. As a function (rather than a description) of desire it is the opposite of stasis.

The link between "ecstasy" and desire in the text is clear when Orlando waits to cross to the post office to wire Shel the message about ecstasy. Repeating 'ecstasy, ecstasy', what comes first to Orlando's mind, as she observes the passing parade of "the wealth and power of England" in their coaches, is the question of sex. She wonders 'how do these leviathans to whom obviously stress, change, and activity are repugnant, propagate their kind?' (275). The thought trails off as Orlando returns home to find her vast order of Victorian books arrived. Having waded through the books, Orlando reaches a conclusion about Victorian literature that is omitted by the biographer for lack of space. There follows what turns out to be a pregnant pause.

⁴ The word "Ecstasy" commonly connotes also a religious or prophetic trance. However, because throughout the text Woolf ironises the terms of her radicalism, "ecstasy" here must be understood in context. For my argument about *Orlando*, Woolf's intersubjective aesthetic is deployed to render intelligible, without closing off, the desire that motivated the text. Woolf's intersubjective aesthetic can be understood as a radical refusal of convention, rather than conformity to the religious convention of the transcendent "soul".

Orlando, having come to this conclusion, stood looking out the window for a considerable space of time. For, when anybody comes to a conclusion it is as if they had tossed the ball over the net and must wait for the unseen antagonist to return it to them. What would be sent her next from the colourless sky above Chesterfield House, she wondered? And with her hands clasped, she stood for a considerable space of time wondering. Suddenly she started... (278)

As Orlando 'started', a four-page stream of poetic parody, recalling the prelude to Orlando's sex change, leads to Orlando being 'safely delivered of a son on Thursday, March the 20th, at three o'clock in the morning' (282). Whatever occurs in this pause in the nonlinear "space of time" – whether the "unseen antagonist" is the agent of propagation – it is clear that in this text propagation and desire are opposites. The disjunction between them has to do with the specific desire being articulated through the text, but is more directly a critique of the compulsoriness of propagation to the project of property transmission between men, via women. Orlando's "ecstasy" in the park bore no direct relation to – and in fact was set in contrast to – propagation. No mention was made of Orlando having sex, and much mention was made of her husband being away. The word "propagation" itself, used in relation to the 'wealth and power of England' in their carriages, was the prompt for the birth.

The poetic parody that alluded to the birth through metaphor ('...under the plum tree, a grape hyacinth, and a crocus, and a bud, too, on the almond tree; so that to walk there is to be thinking of bulbs, hairy and red, thrust into the earth in October; flowering now...' 279-80) and myth (the kingfisher motif of fertility), and set to the music of a barrel-organ, creates an effect of strangeness and nostalgia, literary excess and cliché. The language of Victorian England circumlocuted matters sexual and reproductive, and that coyness is being parodied in this section; but the birth's representation also suggests that Orlando's production of a son is separate from the agency of the desiring Orlando, and merely fulfils the legal convention (buried beneath the literary) of property transmission. The event of the birth falls exactly at the end of the Victorian period. Just as the marriage was rushed through to conform to Victorian literary form, the heralded but dislocated birth scene represents ironically the culmination and crowning glory of the Victorian era. Just as the word "Obey" underwrote the Victorian marriage ceremony, the production of an heir reveals the purpose of marriage. Yet those markers of adult subjectivity – marriage and reproduction – are overtly subordinated to Orlando's priorities, where what matters is not the external markers of subjectivity but the experiencing consciousness; the ecstasy of the desiring subject. Here the text moves to explore from Orlando's side, so to speak, the experiencing

subject. This requires and entails a reconfiguration of narrative time and focus; and in this transformation Woolf models her subjective aesthetic. The context for the transformation is the technologically quickened and scientifically revolutionised twentieth century.

1.6 The Present Moment

The twentieth century opens with a reassurance, 'let the reader take courage; nothing of the same sort is going to happen today, which is not, by any means, the same day' (282). The change of cultural priorities is again mapped in the change of weather, as Orlando looks out of her window onto Park Lane at the time of King Edward's reign. The sky 'was no longer so thick, so watery, so prismatic...the clouds had shrunk to a thin gauze; the sky seemed made of metal...It was a little alarming – this shrinkage' (282-83). The "most remarkable" change, however, was the advent of electricity.

At a touch, a whole room was lit...one could see everything...there was no privacy...At a touch, the whole room was bright. And the sky was bright all night long; and the pavements were bright; everything was bright. (283)

It is this electric age, where light and simultaneity and subjectivity interact to produce the immediacy of consciousness, which delivers Orlando to the presence of her agency. The shift, announced in the text as material change, influences the possible modes for representing subjectivity. A shift away from sentimentality ('It was harder to cry now', 284) and from fertility (of families, literature, ivy) conditions the clarity and greater definition of the pared down ('How narrow women have grown lately! They looked like stalks of corn, straight, shining, identical. And men's faces were as bare as the palm of one's hand', 283) present moment.

The present moment of Orlando's consciousness is defined as an event where space expands to absorb time as one of its objects.

There was something definite and distinct about the age, which reminded her of the eighteenth century, except that there was a distraction, a desperation – as she was thinking this, the immensely long tunnel in which she seemed to have been travelling for hundreds of years widened; the light poured in; her thoughts became mysteriously tightened ... at the same time her hearing quickened; she could hear every whisper and crackle in the room so that the clock ticking on the mantelpiece beat like a hammer. And so for some seconds the light went on becoming brighter and brighter, and she saw everything more clearly and the clock ticked louder and louder until there was a terrific explosion right in her ear. Orlando

leapt as if she had been violently struck on the head. Ten times she was struck. In fact it was ten o'clock in the morning. It was the eleventh of October. It was 1928. It was the present moment. (284)

Time is no longer a controlling tangent of the narrative but a material part of it, as Orlando responds physically to the strikes of the clock. The 'immensely long tunnel' of time, stretching for hundreds of years, widens. The linear narrative momentum becomes a lateral shift and light becomes associated with the quality of Orlando's thoughts (which 'became mysteriously tightened'). This shift, as momentous as the sex/gender change, heralds a change in the way Orlando's consciousness is represented in the narrative. There is a simultaneity to Orlando's thought ('as she was thinking this...') and the expansion of time from the tunnel of the past; the concentration of thought ('mysteriously tightened') opens up the present moment so that Orlando's agency becomes the driving force of the narrative. Where time had previously delineated the story about Orlando and contained its subject, time now becomes an object within the narrative, enfolded within the expanding space of Orlando's consciousness. The narrative traverses centuries, from Elizabethan to Victorian England in the first five chapters. The final part of chapter six expands the narrative microscopically to cover fourteen hours of Orlando's life, and culminates at Orlando's, but also Woolf's, present moment of 'Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen hundred and Twenty Eight' (314). Orlando's moment-to-moment experience of consciousness comes to designate Woolf's subjective aesthetic. Experience, indexed as a present conscious agency, is the mode of representation for her desiring subject. Necessarily intersubjective, the desiring is both Woolf's and Sackville-West's, convergent in the subject of Orlando, and offered as a model for the relationship between *Orlando* and its receptions.

This new narrative arrangement between space and time is tested in the crucible of Orlando's consciousness. Struck by the time, Orlando is late. She jumps into (the first mention of) a "motor-car" and tries to deal with the barrage of (nineteenth- and new twentieth-century) objects that assail the mind when the senses work at high speed.

Vast blue blocks of building rose into the air; the red cowls of chimneys were spotted irregularly across the sky; the road shone like silver-headed nails; omnibuses bore down upon her with sculptured white-faced drivers; she noticed sponges, bird-cages, boxes of green American cloth. But she did not allow these sights to sink into her mind even the fraction of an inch as she crossed the narrow plank of the present, lest she should fall into the raging torrent beneath'. (285)

The 'raging torrent' of thoughts and images for the duration of the narrative threatens constantly to overwhelm the spaciousness of the mind in its present-moment manifestation. The illustrated tension between the torrent of thoughts and images and the precarious present moment, marks the agency of the subject: the moment-to-moment choice between the present moment and the torrent of past and future thoughts constitutes the subject's agency. Orlando's subjectivity is represented as an endless process of negotiation in the evanescent present moment. I complete this textual analysis with close-up attention to the states that Orlando's consciousness entertains as she moves between memories, time and space to come to a conclusion about her own subjective state.

1.7 Time and memory: chasing the wild goose

The shopping scene at Marshall & Snelgrove's department store in the twentieth century parades the change to life, and thus consciousness, wrought by the new science. It is an odd science, described ironically – as Orlando ascends in an elevator – as magic.

The very fabric of life now, she thought as she rose, is magic. In the eighteenth century, we knew how everything was done; but here I rise through the air; I listen to voices in America; I see men flying – but how it's done, I can't even begin to wonder. So my belief in magic returns. (286)

The "magic" comes to parallel Einstein's 'spooky action at a distance' as, through a series of sensory experiences, Orlando conjures into the store the "faithless" Sasha. The event occurs as Orlando shops for sheets for a double bed. Powdering her nose, Orlando's mind turns to memories of Sasha and the frozen Thames where they had skated. The memories compete for attention with the shopman's comments, in the present moment, about the 'best Irish linen'. As she is 'fingering the linen abstractedly' (288) she catches 'a whiff of scent, waxen, tinted as if from pink candles, and the scent curved like a shell round a figure – was it a boy's or was it a girl's? – young, slender, seductive – a girl, by God! furred, pearled, in Russian trousers; but faithless, faithless!' (289). During Orlando's mindless reverie a woman steps off a platform, a 'fat, furred woman, marvellously well preserved, seductive, diademed, a Grand Duke's mistress' (289). Sasha. Shocked that Sasha had 'grown so fat, so lethargic' Orlando opts for avoidance and lowers her head in hope that the "apparition" with its attendant scents and memories 'might pass behind her back unseen' (289). Orlando is returned to the present moment by the shopman's memories, but is shaken by the lapse. 'But

descending in the lift again – so insidious is the repetition of any scene – she was again sunk far beneath the present moment' (290). Where there are omnibuses in Oxford Street, she sees scenes from the frozen Thames. The tension between space (the present moment) and time (past memories) plays out overtly in her consciousness:

"Time has passed over me", she thought, trying to collect herself; "this is the oncome of middle age. How strange it is! Nothing is any longer one thing. ... Her eyes filled with tears.

That Orlando had gone a little too far from the present moment will, perhaps, strike the reader who sees her now preparing to get into her motor-car with her eyes full of tears and visions of Persian mountains. (290-91)

The question running through this section for Orlando, for the biographer, for the reader, is: which and where is Orlando's real self? The answer offered, expressed as an image in the final lines of the text, and implicitly throughout the process of Orlando's subjectivity, is that the self is unavailable and the pursuit of a self, a "wild goose" chase (314). As a meta 'biography' *Orlando* succeeds in dramatising subjective agency as, and in, process, leaving no doubt about the fate of the deluded notion of a gendered, sexed, and altogether conventionally policed 'self'. The biographer enlarges:

the most successful practitioners of the art of life, often unknown people by the way, somehow contrive to synchronize the sixty or seventy different times which beat simultaneously in every normal human system so that when eleven strikes, all the rest chime in unison, and the present is neither a violent disruption nor completely forgotten in the past. (291)

The capacity of the 'successful practitioners of the art of life' to synchronise the "times" of the self into the present moment no doubt accounts for why they are 'often unknown people by the way'. Such are the representational limitations of subjectivity as present moment agency. Against the 'successful practitioners' the biographer poses the rest:

Some we know to be dead though they walk among us; some are not yet born though they go through the forms of life; others are hundreds of years old though they call themselves thirty-six. The true length of a person's life, whatever the *Dictionary of National Biography* may say, is always a matter for dispute. For it is a difficult business – this time-keeping; nothing more quickly disorders it than contact with any of the arts... (292)

Orlando's 'love of poetry' is thus held mockingly accountable for her return to the car without the goods she came to buy. 'Now as she stood with her hand on the door of her motor-car, the present moment again struck her on the head. Eleven times she was violently assaulted.' (292). If traditional linear narrative, organised around time, violently disrupts the subject by dividing its consciousness, then *Orlando* is an art (where art disorders time-keeping) whereby the subject's consciousness prevails over time. Through the text's artifice, space is created for the subject's self-determination. The text is a literary argument for subjective self-determination, against the conventions that determine the subject through the imperative for linearity.

Orlando's experience of speed once again fragments her consciousness:

After twenty minutes the body and mind were like scraps of torn paper tumbling from a sack and, indeed, the process of motoring fast out of London so much resembles the chopping up small of identity which precedes unconsciousness and perhaps death itself, that it is an open question in what sense Orlando can be said to have existed at the present moment. (293)

The material flux recedes as Orlando leaves behind the urban clutter and passes through the blanker rural landscape. The open question of Orlando's existence persists though, even as her mind 'regained the illusion of holding things within itself' (293). Pausing in silence, Orlando proceeds to conjure her self.

Then she called hesitatingly, as if the person she wanted might not be there, 'Orlando?' For if there are (at a venture) seventy-six different times all ticking in the mind at once, how many different people are there not – Heaven help us – all having lodgement at one time or another in the human spirit? (293-94)

Henceforth the narrative concerns Orlando's efforts to call her self into the present. She calls and waits, but 'Orlando did not come' (294). She decides to summons another self. 'For she had a great variety of selves to call upon, far more than we have been able to find room for, since a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas the person may well have as many as a thousand' (294-95). The biographer outlines the options for selves at Orlando's disposal that "he" limits to those already written into the biography. She may have called upon any of those listed:

Perhaps; but what appeared certain (for we are now in the region of 'perhaps' and 'appears') was that the one she needed most kept aloof, for she was, to hear her talk, changing her selves as quickly as she drove – there was a new one at every corner – as happens when, for some unaccountable reason, the conscious self, which is the uppermost, and has the power to desire, wishes to be nothing but one self. This is what some people call the true self, and it is, they say, compact of all the selves we have it in us to be; commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self, which amalgamates and controls them all. Orlando was certainly seeking this self as the reader can judge from hearing her talk as she drove... (295)

This passage, where the biographer is made to define as the absurd "Captain" and "Key self" the object of "his" own biography, and of biography conventionally, embeds the text's critique of selfhood. The irony of this search for selfhood – this wild goose chase of unitary self-same and controlling identity – is its mutual exclusivity with subjectivity. The text dramatises how the "Captain self" takes command at the cost of agency; how the delusion of selves obscures the process of agency; how subjective agency is present only when concepts of selfhood are not.

Orlando's self-talk drives the narrative at this point so the biographer inserts a parenthetical disclaimer to distance "himself" from her talk, which is 'disconnected, trivial, dull and sometimes unintelligible' (296). Beyond the biographer's epistemological certitude, the fragmented selves expressed in Orlando's monologues relegate "his" role to parentheses: 'But Nell, Kit, Sasha? (she was sunk in gloom: tears actually shaped themselves and she had long given over crying). Trees, she said. (Here another self came in.) I love trees (she was passing a clump) growing there a thousand years' (297). One of the selves casually alludes to the 'Oak Tree' poem and the prize Orlando won for it, "'Fame! (She laughed.) fame! Seven editions. A prize.'" And thereby ruins the biographer's punch-line:

(...and we must snatch space to remark how discomposing it is for her biographer that this culmination to which the whole book moved, this peroration with which the book was to end, should be dashed from us on a laugh casually like this; but the truth is that when we write of a woman, everything is out of place – culminations and perorations; the accent never falls where it does with a man). (298)

What might feature in the definition of a masculine subject – the public achievements, the completion of a magnum opus – is tossed up by Orlando as merely one in an

extensive line-up of selves to express. This moment reminds that the delusory self – distinct from subjective agency – is inevitably sexed and gendered.

Orlando first invokes the image of the wild goose as she nears Knole:

'Haunted! Ever since I was a child. There flies the wild goose. It flies past the window out to sea. Up I jumped (she gripped the steering wheel tighter) and stretched after it. But the goose flies too fast. I've seen it, here – there – there – England, Persia, Italy. Always it flies fast out to sea and always I fling after it words like nets... (299)

Haunted by the elusive self, the "I" attempts, but always fails, to capture it. Words flung at the wild goose fall well short. It is only when Orlando drives into the gates of Knole, arriving home literally and metaphorically, that the Orlando she had called comes at last. The 'self' that arrives however, does so in silence, as Orlando's consciousness reaches the present moment. It was as if, for Orlando,

all is contained as water is contained by the sides of a well. So she was now darkened, stilled, and become, with the addition of this Orlando, what is called, rightly or wrongly, a single self, a real self. And she fell silent. For it is probable that when people talk aloud, the selves (of which there may be more than two thousand) are conscious of disavowment, and are trying to communicate, but when communication is established they fall silent. (299)

This state of subjectivity need not suggest that a subjective aesthetic opposed to the volubility of the conventional masculine subject is relegated to silence. Rather, the subject as agent requires perspectival reorientation; it is a moment-to-moment potentiality not a figure laid out materially and chronologically as an object for biography. Orlando takes control of her own story in this process, not as the teller, but as the agent who chooses what is constitutive of her experience of subjectivity. From here she drives "Masterfully" into the grounds of Knole; it is 'as if her mind had become a fluid that flowed round things and enclosed them completely' (300). Orlando has entered a fluid, wave-like state of mind and in this state her ordinary actions and words take on a great significance:

This was true indeed of every moment and action now, usual though they were; so that to see Orlando change her shirt for a pair of whipcord breeches and leather jacket, which she did in three minutes, was to be ravished with the beauty of the movement as if Madame Lopokova were using her highest art. (300-01)

Now become one of those 'successful practitioners of the art of life', Orlando's agency is associated with desire ('to be ravished with the beauty'). In contrast to this art of living, the house is associated with death. As she takes a detailed perambulation of the house she acknowledges that it 'was no longer hers entirely ... It belonged to time now; to history; was past the touch and control of the living' (304).

In this new state of agency, Orlando maintains consciousness in the present moment. It is in the "light" of the present moment that Orlando regards her ancestry through the tunnel (of the long gallery) to the past. 'Yet, she kept, as she had not done when the clock struck ten in London, complete composure (for she was now one and entire, and presented, it may be, a larger surface to the shock of time)' (305). In a self-reflexive moment prompted by her seeing with 'disgusting vividness' Joe Stubbs's thumb without a nail, Orlando senses 'something strange in the shadow that the flicker of her eyes cast' (307); what she senses 'is as a shadow without substance or quality of its own, yet has the power to change whatever it adds itself to'. Here Orlando comes closest to defining her own subjective agency: without substance or quality, yet having the power to change the objects of its focus.

This shadow now ... stole out, and attaching itself to the 'innumerable sights she had been receiving, composed them into something tolerable, comprehensible. Her mind began to toss like the sea. Yes, she thought ... I can begin to live again. I am by the Serpentine, she thought, the little boat is climbing through the white arch of a thousand deaths. I am about to understand... (307)

This section encodes the intellectual conjunction of subjective agency, quantum uncertainty (particle and wave states) and Jauss's "pleasure in understanding": it references Orlando's agency (in composing images of her world), her mind in a wave state (tossing like the sea), her beginning to live, the ecstasy scene, and the relationship of ecstasy to understanding. The ellipsis following 'I am about to understand' is from the text, and it is paralleled in the only other and final ellipsis of the section, on the final page, 'The wild goose'. The relationship between the unfinished sentences alludes to the "pleasure in understanding" that the gendered, sexed, conventional self is a wild goose chase. In place of a discrete, intelligible self for consumption by others, Woolf offers in *Orlando* the pleasure of experiencing intersubjective relations through the powerful lens of present-moment consciousness. Far from evading the 'hard' 'realities' of socially, materially constructed selves, Woolf has provided a radical and

more nuanced model of subjectivity, as it is experienced, than the incongruities of gendered identity have ever offered.

Having presented this reading of *Orlando*, I test my notion of the text's necessarily intersubjective pull against the receptions of Woolf's contemporaries. I have selected ten reviews of the text, all dating around the late 1920s to early 1930s, including some by the leading reviewers of the day.⁵

2 ORLANDO IN 1928

For its 1928 reception the careful literary aesthetic of *Orlando* invited an unconventional dialogism with its readership. The unintelligibility of *Orlando*'s subject was, for some of Woolf's contemporary reviewers, marked by their reflex to dismiss the text as a joke. Those reviewers who dismissed the text as a joke invariably acknowledged, nevertheless, that something new, odd and definitely disturbing – if not articulable – was produced through the text. Quite tellingly, much of the negative criticism reacted to the presumptiveness of the text *vis-a-vis* its readers. Most of the reviewers make reference to readership and criticism in their reviews: the text's force is as much in its reception, this suggests, than on any intrinsic thematic. This critical buzz is an effect of the textual aesthetic's significant insistence on reciprocity; on the inevitably mutual relation between text and reception in the construction of meaning. One perspective superimposed on the other yields nonsense.

Critics of *Orlando* refrain from outright declarations of what it is that troubles them most of all: the gender of the text's author. Much as the experience of gender was suppressed by, though forcefully informed the analyses of, the critics in *Men in Feminism* (see Chapter 1), the critiques of *Orlando* strive to veil the troubling experiences of gender in the critics' confrontation with the text. The best place to discern this phobia is in the metaphors that slip from their guarded resentment. The adjectival insults make it clear that it is less the text than it is Woolf under analysis: "smug", "shameless", "frivolous". Sexing the text is of course a notoriously common approach adopted by many critics of texts written by women. But rather than accept this as a historical truism and disregard its effects in any detail, it is central to an understanding of *Orlando*'s aesthetic that the gendered presuppositions of its criticism be examined.

⁵ These reviews are reproduced in R. Majumdar and A. McLaurin (eds, 1975).

Accustomed to securing the guarantee of their gender through the process of reading, Woolf's contemporaries take personally her text's mockery. The assurance of their gender, on which they rely for their standing, is paraded in the text as a sham. The joke is on them. Their masculine self-identifications require a genuine woman against which to achieve intelligibility. Arnold Bennett, insisting Woolf be "authentically feminine", finds his hopes in literal fragments ('Her best novel, *To the Lighthouse* raised my hopes of her. *Orlando* has dashed them and they lie in iridescent fragments at my feet' 233); and Conrad Aiken advises that 'an ounce of ingenuousness might be worth ten times its weight in ingenuity'; others lament its mockery, its lack of "memorable character". It is not the (suspected) dishonesty of an author that troubles the text's masculine critics, so much as the spectre it raises of the dishonesty of 'Woman' *sui generis*. Woolf's text mimics the fictioning of gender. The text affects their self-identifications as Venus Xtravaganza affected her client's identity (in Chapter 2). The text's sexual aesthetics – diverging sharply from the plaintive request for acceptance in the failed *Well of Loneliness* – do not subordinately yield to the reader's mercy. Instead they challenge the reader to do the work necessary to enable those coded meanings. Reading *Orlando* de genders its reader, whence much of its controversiality. We may not glean the subtleties of Woolf's aesthetic from the reviews of the text selected for discussion below, but we can discern in them the gendered hallmark of Modernism. This context is instrumental to the tenuous relationship Woolf has with a literary epoch she might be understood to have generated, and surpassed.

2.1 Desmond MacCarthy

Desmond MacCarthy reviewed *Orlando* in the *Sunday Times* on 14 October 1928. His review, 'Phantasmagoria', describes the text as 'beautiful and original', 'a work of contemporary youthful sensibility – but will continue ... to seem beautiful and original to readers of the future'. He considers himself 'a backward and almost a reluctant admirer of Mrs Woolf's fiction', conceding:

perhaps if I analyse that reluctance I shall be of service to others who approach her new book in much the same spirit as I did. To do so will, at any rate, explain why in *Orlando*, which is pure fantasy, she appears to have found herself more completely than ever before. (My emphasis.) (Majumdar & McLaurin, eds, 1975: 222)

Such reflections suggest a promising reading that involves the very intersubjectivity *Orlando* invites, in its acknowledgement of the impact of the reading perspective (reluctance, in this instance) in relation to the text. McCarthy expresses sympathy with Woolf's modernist emphasis on "the commonplace", but puzzlement over her

strategies of characterisation, in which her characters 'exist simultaneously' (223). He writes from a perspective where characterisation is indispensable to intelligibility. 'Creation of character is the triumph of the novelist, the achievement through which his work lives, though what "character" precisely means is a question of some obscurity' (224). He engages with Woolf's essay on characterisation, "Mrs Brown" concluding that her own approach to the problem of character 'is to trace in each case the stream of consciousness, to follow in each person his or her inner monologue' (224). But his problem with stream of consciousness is that 'one stream of consciousness is apt to be indistinguishable from another' (224). What he misses is that the strategy of merging and indistinguishability of characters represent a shift away from an objectivist fallacy of materially separate characters. He remains within an aesthetic of "memorable and individual characters" as the hallmark of great literature, so it is in the creation of this type of character that 'her work as a novelist seemed weakest' (224):

She was more interested in the strange emotional content of each moment, and in the wandering reflections of her people than in the people themselves. Facts, ordinary facts, seemed to her dull until they could be removed into the world of subjective experience where outlines melt and vary, and everything can be given – more easily and arbitrarily – the hues of poetry and romance. (224)

Thus his understanding is derailed at the point where the text's "subjective" emphasis requires a more rigorous attention. Woolf's gender allows the reviewer to adopt this pose of condescending support: the text has promise but gets too emotional and fantastic, losing touch with rationality, lapsing into "poetry and romance". In fact it is those "wandering reflections" in the text that constitute the "people themselves". Unable to integrate a critical argument about it, MacCarthy settles for this:

It would take too long to explain the causes of the discontent of the critically alert with the modern novel, and therefore why this defect did not stand in the way of their admiration of her work. (224-25)

His response to the text's characterisation generally is linked to his assumptions about the priority of the masculine pronoun. Describing the text as lacking any real story, he deems it

sufficient to say that Orlando was born to vast possessions in the reign of Elizabeth, and that *he* never died, but changed *his* sex in the reign of Queen Anne, and that "*she*" passes at last, alas! from our view in modern times. It is a wonderful phantasmagoria, in which

imagination has it all its own way and all matter-of-factness is exorcised from the start. (My emphasis.) (225)

This problem enables him to misinterpret the text's framework, and respond with condescension to imagination, as if it were a child having "it all its own way". Thus he misses the transformative potential of the text for reconstituting subjectivity through the strategic – rather than compulsive – deployment of fantasy. Coming out of Romanticism where subjective experience is the foregrounded realm of knowledge, and imagination the means of human redemption, Woolf – in her early twentieth-century modernist context – uses this intelligible mode to consciously and critically contest the hierarchies embedded in language from within language. It becomes obvious from analysis of some of his peers that the ideas developed in the text were already well within circulation in different intellectual forms at the time. For McCarthy to diminish the rigours of the text to a 'wonderful phantasmagoria' in Woolf's childishly sweet imagination, must be understood as a question of choice rather than mere critical incompetence.

Again, missing the implicit critique in Woolf's aesthetic, he abandons his review to the gush of marketing language:

Time and space mean nothing to us as we read. Imagination exaggerates and recombines all the elements which it has garnered from past epochs, and the chariot of romance is driven full tilt from beginning to end, heedless of being dashed to pieces rounding the corners of nonsense. In the world of pure imagination there are no corners. (225)

Not entirely feminised, however, the text's 'Sterne-like faculty for impish divagation frequently relieves the tension of this orgy of romance' (225). Although his review foregoes the task of drawing together the threads of critique, McCarthy concludes with the self-conscious tone with which his review began: 'critics are suspect when they praise contemporary work enthusiastically, but ruling out the judgement of the unduly literal, I have no fear in this case that praise will not be corroborated' (226). In this strangely formulated and ambiguous double negative his last gesture is to fellow critics. Except of course those unduly literal critics who have no use for imagination, others might corroborate his praise. His self-consciousness, pomposity and cautious double-negatives signpost his critical uncertainty in the face of his reading of *Orlando*.

2.2 J. C. Squire

If McCarthy handles the uncertainties produced by a reading of the text with a resort to avuncular praise, J. C. Squire, at the time the chief reviewer for the *Observer*, reclaims his assumption of authority over the text through dramatic analogies that work as threats. Nine years earlier Woolf described him in a letter to Lytton Strachey as 'more repulsive than words can express, and malignant into the bargain', and later described this review as "barking" (Majumdar & McLaurin, eds, 1975: 227). The text's apparent unintelligibility is the central point of Squire's irritation. 'This book is easier to read than to describe. It is, indeed, very easy to read and very difficult to describe' it is 'of so odd and original a conception that a summary of its theme is almost impossible' (227). The gender uncertainty is one of the first problems he raises:

The old chroniclers, when describing the sack of cities, commonly said that the brutal victors 'respected neither age nor sex'. In this sole respect the author of *Orlando* resembles the pikemen of Alva and the musketeers of tilly. The reader never knows when he is going to be whisked forward for a century, and in the middle of the story the hero calmly changes from a man to a woman. (227)

The affect of this gender uncertainty on Squire leads him to raise it in the context of stories of "brutal victors". Although he draws parallels here between Woolf and the victors, their actions of sacking cities are historically unequivocally masculine, and this is revealed as a thinly veiled threat of the consequences of failing to "respect" the differences between the sexes. In the context of historical invasions, he reminds, it is women who suffer more from the lack of distinction between sexes: Squire's message is that this distinction is for women's own protection. This construal of gender exemplifies Butler's assertion that the cultural regulation of gender identification involves threat and the internalisation of fear of the consequences of a failure to accede to the process. To reassert certainty Squire genders the reader masculine ('the reader never knows when *he* is going to be...'), in a move that must once again be understood as chosen, given the context of the critique. Even *Orlando* is denoted by the masculine pronoun:

Orlando, although he never goes so far as to be more than one person at one time, is a successive selection from the ancestors of a lady of our own day, for whose portrait Miss V. Sackville-West, to whom the book is dedicated, has posed. (228)

Through the confusing subordinate clauses here, Squire seems to be suggesting that the book's inspiration is the reverse of that described by Woolf. For Woolf, it is a portrait

of Vita Sackville-West and she draws on Vita's ancestry to explore the possibilities for the representation of her subjectivity across historical contexts. For Squire, it seems that because she is still alive, Vita Sackville-West is able to stand in for what is actually a portrait of her ancestors. In a wilfully obliterating misreading of the desire motivating the text, Squire reiterates the narratives of History that the text exists to displace, and describes it as a story about the men in the Sackville-West line, understanding Orlando to be a man. Despite its notoriety as a book by a woman for another woman, Squire plays dumb. Yet his awareness of the sexual subtext is apparent in his comparison of Woolf with another lesbian writer, Stein. Woolf comes off best against 'the intolerable gibberings of Miss Gertrude Stein' (227). One can only guess whether Squire found Joyce's gibberings more tolerable, as he is one of the only reviewers to avoid that comparison. In the context of the shared modernist aesthetics of Woolf, Stein and Joyce, Joyce's absence from the comparison clinches the issue. Squire judges the characterisation in *Orlando* a failure on the basis that 'Orlando is never a person' (228), and declares, in a moment of failed prophecy: 'The book, however, will no more be read for any allegorical significance it may have than for its study of a character which does not exist' (228). Just as Orlando lacks the coherence required of "his" gender, Woolf lacks the qualities expected of women:

This book, one feels, was conceived frivolously and chancily, and carried through with too painstaking a spontaneity and too little affection or respect for the reader, the intelligence in it being immeasurably in excess of the mirth, the response to beauty, the emotional interest in history, morals, character, or anything else. Possibly it is the work of a mind which, at bottom, is purely critical. (229)

Driving the stereotype of the "humourless feminist", Squire's criticisms are of Woolf's gender failure: no respect for her reader, frivolous, yet too intelligent, aiming less to please than to critique. The passion in his response suggests Squire understands exactly what this text is about, and why he overstates his conclusion with another nasty metaphor:

I have no desire to break a butterfly upon a wheel, or even to impale it upon a pin: this book is a very pleasant trifle, and will entertain the drawing-rooms for an hour: a suitable companion for the jade carving and the painted snuff-boxes. (229)

In one hit he invokes a sexually violent metaphor – to "impale" a butterfly – and characterises her work as trifling, asserting over her apparent frailty his own power to break and impale, should he be bothered. The language used by its reviewers reveals

the text's effectiveness in thwarting conventional assumptions. This text insists the positionality of reading, and calls the bluff of those positions unconsciously brought to it. It interferes with the sense of selfhood so tremulous in early modernism; and reveals there is much to lose by acknowledging one's position *as* a position.

2.3 Arnold Bennett

Woolf wrote to Sackville-West 'Jack Squire annoyed you, but ... Arnold Bennett will be far worse, so be prepared'. Bennett wanted to make it clear from the title of his review, 'A Woman's High-Brow Lark', that this was a text of no significance; notably, not a "high-brow lark", but a "woman's high-brow lark". Establishing the parochiality of the text's presumed audience, the 1928 review begins:

You cannot keep your end up at a London dinner-party in these weeks unless you have read Mrs Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. For about a fortnight I succeeded in not reading it - partly from obstinacy and partly from a natural desire for altercation at table about what ought and ought not to be read. Then I saw that Hugh Walpole had described it as 'another masterpiece', and that Desmond MacCarthy had given it very high praise. (Majumdar & McLaurin, eds, 1975: 232)

The justification for bothering with *Orlando* is revealing of the state of criticism of the time. Bennett understands his role as critic to be one of devil's advocacy - 'a natural desire for altercation' - and, in the subjective and opinionated context of dinner-party banter, to determine the reception of a text: 'what ought and ought not to be read'. But in this instance *Orlando* has been already afforded standing by the respected opinions of Bennett's confreres, and it is his desire to keep his "end up" for them that prompts him to proceed with the text.

Bennett describes it as 'a very odd volume', referring initially to its play with extra-literary conventions such as the parodic preface and index. Playing it straight, he is perplexed by their functions, admitting 'some justification for the preface, but none for the index' (232). Refusing the text's implicit critique, Bennett describes its aesthetic as "fanciful embroidery", complaining that 'Mrs Woolf does not *seem* to have understood that fancy must have something to play *on*. She has left out the basic substance' (233). If the imagination was for Romanticism inherently masculine, then Woolf's games with gender and imagination represent a direct challenge to that exclusivity. Bennett's defensive strike is to align Woolf's imaginative experimentation with the feminised and thereby devalued labour of embroidery. In her quest for art, Woolf has managed only craft. The missing "basic substance" turns out to be sexed.

The theme is a great one. But it is a theme for a Victor Hugo, not for Mrs Woolf, who, while sometimes excelling in fancy and in delicate realistic observation, has never yet shown the *mighty imaginative power* which the theme clearly demands. (My emphasis.) (233)

As if to reinforce the gendered gulf between Woolf and "greatness", Bennett concludes with a comparison. Edwin Muir had published *The Structure of the Novel* through the Hogarth Press and cited James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Aldous Huxley as the 'only important innovating novelists'. Bennett responds 'I would concede him the first and the last, but I have horrid doubts about the middle term' (233). Evidently the horror is activated by more than simply literary aesthetics. The relationship between WWI, masochism and contested masculinity (discussed in Chapter 3), suggests the context for interpreting Bennett's hysteria. Woolf's relativising aesthetic asks too much of those whose self concept is not sufficiently developed to be relinquished.

Bennett's programmatic feminisation of Woolf's texts is stark in his essay 'The Progress of the Novel', in which he considers the innovations of Proust, Lawrence, Mottram, Joyce and Woolf.

Virginia Woolf has passionate praisers, who maintain that she is a discoverer in psychology and in form. Disagreeing, I regard her alleged form as the absence of form, and her psychology as an unco-ordinated mass of interesting details, none of which is truly original. All that I can urge in her favour is that she is *authentically feminine*, and that her style is admirable. Both of these qualities are beside my point. Of the above mentioned five, only Joyce is of the dynasty of precursors and sure of a place in the history of the development of the novel. (My emphasis) (234)

The patrilineal investments of his critique are clear here: in terms of a literary forefather, Joyce is the only one who qualifies for a part in dynasticism, being heterosexual and a man. If Bennett here confuses literary with literal dynasticism, the other contenders are by definition ruled out, without consideration of their literary efforts: Proust was gay, Lawrence impotent (and implicitly bisexual), Woolf feminist, "sapphic" and without children, and Mottram, perhaps a red herring. Bennett's jibe that Woolf is "authentically feminine" in the context of his denying her creative ability, characterises the debate about literary precursors as a masculine desire for generative impact, in its confusion of literary with literal reproduction.

2.4 Raymond Mortimer

Notably silent on the text's reception in the UK Raymond Mortimer, in his review for *The Bookman*, refers to the 'magnificently generous reception' of *Orlando* in the USA (Majumdar & McLaurin, eds, 1975: 238).⁶ Woolf has, he declares 'revolutionized fiction', and both she and Strachey are so individual 'that any imitation of them can only be disastrous' (238). Imitation, traditionally deemed the highest form of praise, is also here apparently a question of professional engenderment: 'And soon some young lady is sure to caricature Mrs Woolf's methods just as Mr Guedalla has caricatured Mr Strachey's' (238-39). Woolf's text is taken to be implicitly and foremost a woman's text, that young women but not young men might (vainly) aspire to imitate. The feminist reception of Woolf, as I will discuss in the next Chapter, reproduced that essentialist practice, sustaining the idealism of a woman-specificity in literature, and bringing Woolf to account for her failures to meet this ideal.

Contrary to Bennett's assessment of Woolf as incapable of founding a dynasty Mortimer, also thinking along dynastic lines, pronounces Woolf and Strachey unlikely to do so for lack of will rather than ability:

Like most successful makers of revolution, Mrs Woolf and Mr Strachey are unlikely to found a dynasty – neither do they wish to as they are artists, individualists, and revolutionaries "by chance". (239)

His critique is less coy about naming the motives for Woolf's aesthetics. As both she and Strachey 'spring from the centre of Nineteenth Century English culture ... [t]he weapons they have turned on the Victorians were forged in Victorian homes' (239). Mortimer distinguishes them from other Victorian iconoclasts who were 'so taken up with attacking established religions that they never scrutinized established morals'. By contrast, '[n]ever were novels less propagandist, less *romans à thèse*, than those of Mrs Woolf' (239). Whereas Squire plays dumb in his construction of the text's story, Mortimer makes it clear: 'it is no secret that *Orlando* is a portrait of Mrs Harold Nicholson' (241). It is above all this open secret that unsettles the English readers of *Orlando*, still bearing in their collective memories the shameful fame of Oscar Wilde.

The accretion of generations which you find at Knole is something peculiarly English. One Sackville flaunted an Italian mistress in the face of Europe, another a Spanish dancer, but more characteristic is the fact that a third, at Harrow, was Byron's fag. (241)

⁶ Mortimer is described as an 'English literary critic and journalist. A friend of Virginia Woolf and closely associated with Bloomsbury in the 1920s' (Majumdar & McLaurin, eds, 1975: 238).

Homosexuality, in Mortimer's account, is that "something peculiarly English" that most of the English critics hysterically conceal in their responses to *Orlando*.

2.5 Conrad Aiken

Writing from America, at one remove from Woolf's milieu, Conrad Aiken takes a different strategy to his discomfort in relation to *Orlando*. Rather than trivialise its skill and compare it negatively to the apparently 'mighty imaginative power' of a masculine writer, Aiken's strategy is to oppose ingenuity and beauty, and condemn the text in terms of its overemphasis on the former and consequent lack of the latter. *Orlando* suggests that Woolf 'is, and has perhaps always been, in danger of carrying ingenuity too far' (Majumdar & McLaurin, eds, 1975: 234), a fault many writers plausibly strive to cultivate. The text is 'exceedingly, not to say disconcertingly, clever. In England as well as in America it has set the critics by the ears. They have not known quite how to take it' (234). This simple admission resonates through most of the reviews, if through more covert reactions. It significantly dates the review that its author could be avowedly disconcerted to encounter a text written by a woman to be too clever for the men whose business it is to critique – and to understand – everything.

The attributed reason for its confusion is that the text is a joke; a joke which is on its readers: 'the tone of the book, from the very first pages, is a tone of mockery' (235); she has 'expanded a *jeu d'esprit* to the length of a novel' (235); it is 'a kind of colossal pun' (235):

one might compare it with *Alice in Wonderland*; for if the latter is an inspired dream, organized with a logic almost insanely unswerving, so the former is a kind of inspired joke, a joke charged with meanings, in which the logic, if not quite so meticulous, is at any rate pressing. (235)

Here what Aiken intends as a thinly veiled insult – the logic is not quite up to Lewis's – turns out to reveal his misunderstanding of *Orlando*'s games with logic. For him, Woolf does not take the thing seriously, and wants us to know 'that she is pulling legs, keeping her tongue in her cheek, and winking, now and then, a quite shameless and enormous wink' (235). Such shameless use of anatomy – tongue and eyes – to hoodwink the reader constructs in his description a confused picture of threateningly unfeminine behaviour. This renders her style 'a little unfortunate. It is a style which makes fun of style: it is glibly rhetorical, glibly sententious, glibly poetic, glibly analytical, glibly austere, by turns – deliberately so' (235).

Her theme, the 'smug annihilation of time' may have required a tone 'quite frankly and elaborately artificial' but he wonders whether she has not been 'too icily and wretchedly elaborate in this' (235). Smug, artificial, icy – again the response yields women-specific insults. Aiken grants that Woolf 'wanted to trace the aesthetic evolution of a family (and by implication of a country) over a period of three hundred years' and that it's a 'really first-rate idea' to embody this story in one undying person. Nevertheless, he asks,

need she quite so much have presumed on our incredulity? One suspects that in such a situation an ounce of ingenueness might be worth ten times its weight in ingenuity; and that a little more of the direct and deep sincerity of the last few pages, which are really beautiful and really moving, might have made *Orlando* a minor masterpiece. (235)

Minor masterpiece. Not quite up to the logic of Lewis. Not in the same league as a major masterpiece, *Orlando* is penalised because Woolf "presumes" on her readership, and refuses to repay them with sincerity and artlessness. These echo a historic lament of women's insincerity, iciness, artfulness, ingratitude, and refusal to reveal themselves. The critics are not reading *Orlando*, but Woolf.

As it is, it is an extremely amusing and brilliant *tour de force*. It is as packed with reference, almost, as *The Waste Land*. Some of the references, it is true, are too esoteric – for one not in the enchanted circle – to be universally valid; and this may or may not be thought a mistake. (236)

Aiken is right: that milieu provides meaning (that meaning requires a context), but wrong to assume that outside of these there is a universally valid meaning to be made. He may not get the content of the jokes, but he certainly misses the structural purpose of the joke as a form: here it represents the consensual specificity of meaning-making, and raises the question about whose 'jokes' have been prevalent historically and generically.

Once again, the theme is praiseworthy, in theory, but faulted in its execution. It 'might have evoked a profusion of beauty' but Woolf's is a qualified sort of beauty:

Her roses are cloth roses, her scenes are scenes from a tapestry, her "wisdom" (that is, her *shrewd and very feminine* comments on men and things) has about it an air of florid and cynical frigidity, a weariness wrought into form: as if – to change the image – she were

stringing for her own entertainment a necklace of beautifully polished platitudes. (My emphasis.) (236)

Fake roses, borrowed scenes, not-wisdom (because "shrewd and very feminine"); the line up of hysterically gender-specific insults tries hard to render inauthentic, by an emphasis on gender, the voice in the text. In its "cynical frigidity" *Orlando* fails to entreat him sexually. More specifically its parading of gender truths as cultural invention is where the text issues its sharpest challenge. This is the impetus behind his shift in image. If the text presents a sexual withdrawal then it becomes a piece of deceptive trickery, a game for *her own* entertainment (disregarding the men who read it); a trite object, a 'necklace of beautifully polished platitudes'. In Aiken's psychodramatic reading games this text, by a woman, strung him along and then refused him. Of course he was not alone in his construal of Woolf as frigid. With more cultural authority than Aiken has in this review, but with the same sexually-determined fictions, psychoanalysis too "diagnosed" Woolf's sexuality as frigid.

Taking a Lawrentian dislike to her implacable modernity Aiken concludes that Woolf is too civilised 'in the Kensington Gardens sense of the word' (236), 'burdened with sophistication', and fails to present 'a glimpse into the sheer horror of things, the chaos that yawns under Bloomsbury'. In an era where the hysterical search for masculine identity reached fever pitch in the nazification of Germany, Aiken fails to see in this text the very critique he calls for. The text offers a way to read and rethink those underlying fears that structure authoritarianism; but like the critics he refers to at the beginning of his review – and heavily invested in the identity politics that underwrote the "horror" yawning under Bloomsbury – he lacks the ears to hear.

2.6 Cleveland Chase

Owing to his relative familiarity with literary currents of the time Cleveland Chase's review in the *New York Times* in 1928 articulates a clearer understanding of Woolf's aesthetic, and so refrains from lapsing into vituperative reaction for its authority. Chase describes *Orlando* as 'an application to writing of the Einstein theory of relativity' because it is

largely preoccupied with the "time" element in character and human relationships, and with a statement of the exact complexion of that intangible moment, a combination of past and future of objective reality and subjective consciousness, which we refer to as the present. (Majumdar & McLaurin, eds, 1975: 230)

Implicitly addressing quantum descriptions of space and time that were beginning to circulate early in the twentieth century, Chase discerns in Woolf's aesthetic an awareness that time is as much a subjectively felt phenomenon, as an objective or external measurement. Understanding that this textual thematic is produced through the text's literary processes, Chase presents a more competent critique of its characterisation than the previous reviewers were able to do.

The most stimulating section of the book, describes Orlando at the present moment, and traces with breath-taking delicacy the influence of her past upon her present. It is in these last thirty-odd pages that the book springs startlingly to life ... she seems to reach down through the whole superstructure of life and to lay bare a new, or at least a hitherto unperceived, arrangement of those ephemeral flashes of memory or perception that go to make up consciousness. (230-31)

Contrary to MacCarthy's misunderstanding of stream-of-consciousness, Squire's dismissal of the text's characterisation, and Bennett's disparagement of Woolf's formalism, Chase concludes that Woolf has

carried the "stream of consciousness" technique a step further; she has not been satisfied to present a succession of thoughts and sensations passing through the mind; she shows what is behind those thoughts and sensations, whence they spring, and how great their relative value. (231)

Conceding that though she may not yet have resolved it, he finds that Woolf has succinctly stated a problem for contemporary novelists. And in contrast to Squire's and Bennett's convictions that Woolf's work will have no impact on the development of the novel, Chase positions Woolf at the vanguard of modernist novelists:

It is something of a question whether the tendency of contemporary novelists to become more and more introspective can profitably be carried much further. If it is to continue, however, Mrs Woolf has pointed out the direction in which it must develop. (231)

2.7 Helen MacAfee

Helen MacAfee may have been one of the reviewers whom Raymond Mortimer had in mind when he described the 'magnificently generous reception' of *Orlando* in the USA. Her role as an American literary critic and managing editor of the *Yale Review* conditions a more informed background to Woolf's aesthetics. Discerning the motives for Woolf's politicised formalism MacAfee writes that Woolf has 'from the first shown

herself impatient of the old categories, and now in her latest novel she declares her independence openly in the subtitle, "a biography" (Majumdar & McLaurin, eds, 1975: 237). MacAfee is, significantly, the only reviewer to remark on the formal experimentation in the choice of biography as the text's genre. In distinct contrast to the previous reviewers' rhetorically dramatic confusions, she responds to the terms of the text. 'Readers who are interested in such matters may find in it a whole philosophy of creative literature, a subtle speculation upon personality and recorded time' (237). The same goes for the pronoun of the main character:

Orlando is a boldly conceived and finely executed dramatization of the civilized current of three centuries, imagined as flowing through the veins of *a person* who existed in the flesh as a man...[and] was mysteriously transformed into a woman. (My emphasis.) (237)

In an implicit critique of the gendered assumptions of her contemporaries, MacAfee concludes:

Orlando may be taken as an answer to those who have questioned whether she could handle with equal success a larger scheme and implications of greater scope. It is a book rich in humanity, a spirited prose epic of intellectual adventure. (237)

The Enlightenment concept of "humanity" is still here taken to be the measure of a work. Its masculine bias is evident in the adjudications of the reviewers: where the notion of humanity equates to masculinity, this text is found lacking such humanity; where the notion strains to include women, this text might be construed, as it is by MacAfee, as possessing humanity.

2.8 Jean-Jacques Mayoux

Coming out of a different philosophical tradition, both of the French reviewers in *Virginia Woolf: the Critical Heritage* are *au fait* with the philosophical questions posed in *Orlando*, and in Woolf's work more generally. According to Jean-Jacques Mayoux, Woolf is 'entirely dedicated to spiritual things, to understanding and expressing profound realities, which are at the same time intimate and universal' (Majumdar & McLaurin, eds, 1975: 246). Implicitly gendering realism masculine, he describes Woolf as 'singularly detached from an epoch of low brows and strong jaws which has Action for its goddess. Nothing is a matter of indifference to her, except social problems'. The context suggests that this is not a criticism, along the familiar lines of anti-Bloomsbury realism, that her aesthetic does not engage a materialist critique. In the unchecked use of biological terms ("low brow" and "strong jaws") for describing

the masculine emphasis of early Modernism on action and change, he suggests, rather, that gender is foremost in her critique. Her apparent 'indifference...to social problems' marks not her departure from political critique, but her more subtle strategy for change. Woolf is 'courageous enough not to shrink from highly charged words. She seeks to project a vision of the world rather than reflect the age or fabricate characters and situations' and she gives to her epoch 'a benevolence tinged with irony, the safeguard of her independence' (247). Although Mayoux does not set out to describe a frame for Woolf's aesthetics, he engages with the effects of her strategies. He may not articulate the politicising effects of a shift in focus from time to space, but he discerns the move. Space, in *Jacob's Room*, is 'created directly, and described in its effect, it is no longer a question of mere assertion' (247-48). (The effectiveness of Woolf's strategy of direct creation, in contrast to mere assertion, structures her characterisation of subjective difference, particularly in *Orlando*. This is what distinguishes her gender politics most significantly from the shamed assertion of queer self-avowal, in the arguments between Sedgwick and Butler around speech act theory.)

The presence of space is torn through by linear conceptions of time, that rend the space in fragments. Reconstructing a reality from the apparently least "important" of these fragments is most likely to produce the immediateness of reality. For Mayoux this is what Woolf achieves.

Our conscious habits of thought obstinately turn us away from this apprehension towards a logical connection and continuity in time, towards something which at least holds the promise of a logical meaning...[w]here does this space end, on which our existence depends? Where does Jacob's multiple room come to an end, this room which his imagination, his conscious or unconscious self, continues to cling to obscurely? At what point, if one ascends high enough, does space begin to belong less to Jacob than Jacob belong to space? (248-49)

A sustained effect of Woolf's aesthetics is an interrogative response from her reviewers: they frequently respond with questions (about how she could so presume upon them, or about space time). Woolf's is not a programmatic aesthetic, and it does not belong to the realm of material certitude. Her critique does not urge systematic political change. Rather, her intersubjective aesthetic destabilises epistemological certitude, clearly having effect on her readership. The focus on perspective is literal as well as figurative: 'This distant view, from high in space is an ironic commentary on the action' (249). Here Mayoux's comment invokes a parallel with Einstein's "aesthetic", insofar as Einstein placed himself (imaginatively) into orbit in outer space

to develop an experiential understanding of the quantum world.⁷ Not yet banished from the critical lexicon in the early twentieth century, imagination still has intellectual credibility: '*Orlando* is a portrait of the imagination, the symbolic painting of duration considered as an image store, and of the way in which the past reappears in the present' (249). Comparing it to Proust's *Time Regained*, Mayoux notes the radical difference between them of tone. Proust's anguish comes from his attachment to regaining passed time. 'The total lack of dramatic pressure, of emotive tonality in *Orlando* comes from the absence of the flow of life and of the peril of death. *Orlando* is the happy solution to a problem which is not posed' (249). It is not an argument about, but a creation of, a certain freedom for the mind.

Is it not a good indication of the quality of her writing that such important and difficult subjects as the dimensions of all existence have been with so much flexibility and variety transposed into an aesthetic order, that vision has been made from thought? (250)

This last phrase 'vision made from thought' includes Woolf's notion of the ungendered mind. Here the mind is not determined by the body; its freedom lies in its capacity to create its 'vision'. An ungendered mind is not the same thing as androgyny (which exists at a more material level), nor does it simplistically deny the effects of gender construction on thought. The point about *Orlando* spanning ages is that the mind is not immutably gendered and that some subjective component of self – its present manifestation – resists the externally imposed constraints of gender and even the internalised effects. That the reviewer has worked with some of the text's treatment of subjectivity, where others have turned a blind eye, is explained in part by his response to *Orlando*'s sex change.

It is the fantastic biography...of a hero who lives three hundred and fifty years, and who becomes heroine halfway through (and we know for certain that we are all more or less bisexual). (249)

Mayoux adopts the parenthetical tone of the biographer in *Orlando*, only his indifference to this issue is rather less suspect. Contrary to the mock outrage of some of the English and American reviewers, Mayoux responds with a Continental nonchalance to the apparent bisexuality in everyone. Rather than a quirk of an overcharged imagination, this turn in the text – the least plausible for many reviewers – is here taken as the representation of an uncontroversial certainty about sexuality.

⁷ This is how he gave shape to his famous theory of relativity, though the culture that formaldehyded his much examined brain has not emphasised this fact that Einstein was a space cadet.

It is jarring, therefore, when Mayoux concludes puzzlingly: 'The critic deviates towards ideas as if drawn by an irresistible vice; and it is the last, least glorious, but perhaps not the least useful of his duties, to warn against his deformation' (250). Having indulged in the ideas of the text (that "irresistible vice") he now disclaims the relationship. The process of entering into dialogic relation with a text structured through a decentralising of the "common reader" is clearly more potent in effect than in rhetoric. Thus he issues a warning to other critics (gendered masculine) against their "deformation".

2.9 Paul Dottin

Paul Dottin, French university teacher of English, and a literary critic, describes Woolf as part of the English literary *avant garde*. Specifically, she represents the part of the *avant garde* 'which has freed itself most completely from classical moulds and from the traditional rules' because 'the novels of Mrs Woolf are as far as possible from the Latin habits of clarity, precision and order, in a word, from the Latin genius' (Majumdar & McLaurin, eds, 1975: 251). This diametric opposition to Latin genius is only an insult (or a backhanded compliment) if the critique in Woolf's aesthetic is not understood. Modernist notions of genius are precisely what *Orlando* critiques, for the ideological constructs that they evidently are, most notably in her constructions of Addison and Pope. Dottin's ambivalence toward her aesthetic is apparent in his opposition of the intelligentsia with what he describes unflinchingly as the ordinary sensible man.

Mrs Woolf is no prophet in her own country: only the admirers of Dorothy Richardson and Marcel Proust appreciate her – those who regard themselves as members of the intelligentsia and whom the ordinary sensible man has dubbed "highbrows". As for the Americans, their impression of Mrs Woolf and her works is summed up in the terse formula: 'a tough proposition'. (251)

Apparently outside of all these perspectives, Dottin finds Woolf's novels 'worth the trouble involved in understanding them'; written in clear language, bearing complex and obscure thought. Like Mayoux he is neither affronted nor confused by Orlando's change of sex. He describes it as 'a pastiche of the "passionate style" of De Quincey which is particularly successful' (253-54). Despite its beauty, however, the novel 'leaves the impression of something incomplete, disappointing, and imperfect' (254). The novel removes the subject from the reader's gaze and delivers "her" into the present of her own consciousness, outside the scope of external observance. To a

reading practice that wants its character to be a known quantity – a friend – by the end, or something to grasp, even symbolically, this text fails to deliver. The French reviewers have picked up on the thematics of the text, but have not proceeded further into understanding its structural *effects*; that would involve a self-reflexive awareness of their own reading practices. Clearly such self-consciousness is a question of volition.

The fault Woolf has allowed to develop (since *Mrs Dalloway*) is 'the mania of gossiping without rhyme or reason to her reader'. If we take literally Dottin's "without rhyme or reason" then we understand how he can misconstrue as "gossip" a discourse which aims to function outside of Latin classicism's key features (rhyme and reason).

She appears to feel the need for commenting on or explaining the least gestures of her characters. No doubt she is here in the purest tradition of the English novel, that of Fielding. But in her own novel she multiplies these intrusions excessively, arresting the action and appearing to take a perverse delight in irritating the reader. It is all the more annoying in that *Orlando* is full of anachronisms, most of them deliberate. (254)

Here again the response is focused on the self-conscious intrusion of the narrator, presuming upon her readers through "deliberate" anachronisms, "arresting the action", "perverse delight". Its perversity is of course part of its point. The text, if nothing else, *implicates* its reader. It compels them to grapple with the effects it has on them; with the strategies it deliberately deploys to "deform" them. This text is no joke. The feelings of emptiness – something missing, incomplete – are a consequence of Woolf's subjective aesthetic. The habit of reading for identification produces in this text the profound anxiety that occurs when subject-object relations no longer structure subjectivity. There is no essential character, and yet some kind of subjectivity might be said to have been driving the narrative. This is the challenge thrown down by the text: the rendering intelligible of a subjectivity that resides in process. The text projects this knowledge into an experiential understanding.

Contrary to other comparisons with Joyce, Woolf in Dottin's case is the preferred *avant gardiste*: '*Orlando* marks a considerable effort towards clarity, an almost complete renunciation of the Joycean pattern' (254). Dottin concludes with a coded warning about Woolf's interventions. She has the potential to write an immortal book:

But she must remember that the self is hateful and that the modern reader is a big enough boy to understand all by himself that novel which his predilections have induced him to choose. (254)

This final expression of frustration suggests that the mediatedness of the subject – through the biographer's voice ever present in cultural transmission – remains alien to his understanding. To have it in his face is frustrating because it undermines the very authority he (as a "big enough boy") is trying to develop through the acculturating, and clearly for him, engendering, process of reading literature.

2.10 Storm Jameson

One modernist reader who is not a "big enough boy" is little Mr Robinson, fabricated by English novelist Storm Jameson in an attempt to mediate the unacknowledged eroticism of her response to the text. Her review begins with Mr Robinson, an "ordinary" man, who is trying to pick his way through Georgian literature (Majumdar & McLaurin, eds, 1975: 244).

There are moments when, blushing for the difficulty he finds in saying suitably what he deeply feels, little Mr Robinson puts his money on her rather than on Mr Huxley. One of these moments happened to him after he had read *Orlando*. He read it with delight, with awe, disturbed, enchanted, exalted. And yet wondering. (244)

If the origins of the difficulty in articulating his feelings are ambiguous – because he belongs to a less articulate class, that of the "ordinary man"; or because his feelings are sexual – his blush lends weight to the latter. Having separated off her feelings about the text through the device of little Mr Robinson, Jameson restricts herself to the literary. She describes Woolf as 'beyond comparison, a master of language' (244). *Orlando* is:

just, flexible, and lovely. Add that it owes to sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, more to Sterne, and confess that Mrs Woolf apprenticed herself to masters who were good enough to teach her what she already divined. (244)

Just like the men who reviewed the text, Jameson's response is inlaid with her gender identifications. This is not because there is anything essential and essentially different about men who review and women who review; as if their critical faculties are ineluctably gendered. On the contrary, *Orlando* interrupts the truth of the continuity between sex and gender identity, and the inescapability of their effects on subjectivity;

that men can only and naturally write as men and women as women. The more identified the reader is with the truth of their gender, the less likely they are to "get it". In this instance, unlike the men reviewers of the text, Jameson makes comparisons in order to elevate Woolf. In the other reviews the purpose of the comparisons with men writers is to ensure that Woolf always falls short: not quite so meticulously logical as Lewis, not as funny as Sterne, not as mighty as Hugo, not as innovative as Joyce, not as researched as Eliot; not a major but a minor masterpiece. Embedded in Jameson's assertion that Woolf 'apprenticed herself to masters who were good enough to teach her what she already divined' is the experience that Jameson must herself have had as a woman writing in that cultural context. It describes the barrier of condescension that successful women have faced in paying dues to men whose talents they surpass.

Unthreatened by the text's aesthetics Jameson is clear on the narrative perspective. 'What we see is a process, the very chemistry of thought in action' (244-45). No longer in the presence of little Mr Robinson Jameson takes liberties with her role and sets *Orlando* apart as the best novel by any living English novelist.

In no light does it cease to be strange, subtle, exciting, and lovely. It enters the soul of the reader through his ears. To turn, immediately on reading *Orlando*, to a book by any other living English novelist, is to find his beauties commonplace, his style poor and flat. (245)

But as a consequence of her gender self-identifications Jameson cannot sustain the confident support of this text by another woman. In a parenthetical gesture she yields her perspective to the "common man".

And yet (we are back again with little Mr Robinson, now fairly wringing his hands in an anguish of self-abasement) – Something is missing. What is missing? Why is it that the author of *Orlando* is not a very great novelist? (245)

In his physical stature we surmise "little" Mr Robinson's cultural capital, and yet his presence is sufficient to stifle the self-confidence required by Jameson to come out in support of her provocative peer. Fearful of an evidently newfound freedom Jameson reaches for her literary chaperone. When he enters the picture, she is reminded of something missing. Little Mr Robinson's interest in *Orlando* begins, in Jameson's imagination, with shame (blushing inarticulacy) and ends in 'an anguish of self-abasement'. The text unmans him. It is apparent through Jameson's imagery that the phallic legitimacy, which might inflate little Mr Robinson's standing in her company, is what is missing. What is missing is a cultural reinforcement of masculine subjectivity

that little Mr Robinson elsewhere draws on for his authority. Whether this feature is missing in the novel or the novelist is a moot point: the context conflates the two into one.

With little Mr Robinson present to alter her course Jameson answers her own question:

It may be, I think, because she lacks humanity. She is in some way, or by some *word* laid on her, outside humanity. She sees as an artist sees, listens as a musician does, to common suffering, crying, laughing, doing good and doing mischief. Doubtless she suffers, weeps, laughs, herself – but *not as a man does*. As a fallen angel might. Or a changeling. (My emphasis.) (245)

Used “generically” this not seeing “as a man does”, marks Woolf as an outsider to humanity. This is a perfect illustration of the perfidious effects of “generic” masculinity, most conspicuous in the masculine pronoun. Interpreted from a grammatically masculine perspective – whether by a woman or a man – cultural products that focus on grammatically feminine voices can only be taken as falling short of the mark. Of course, what the reviewers find missing, whether or not they articulate it, is a representation of masculine subjectivity, that figure of “humanity” that stands in for all people (irrespective of sex, gender, class, race, ideology). In an intelligible context Woolf has managed to effect a character who refuses traditional notions of characterisation. Most of its reviewers are so much inside of that construction – depend on it so much for their self-identifications – that they are unwilling to discern a representation of character outside its limits. Unaware of the deconstruction of this apparent “truth” – because they are too close to it to see it as anything other than universal – they act out of their frustrations and turn to project their uncertainty onto Woolf. It is Woolf who is confusing, it is the novel that lacks something. Added to this, in Jameson’s review there is this inarticulable *word* that is laid on Woolf. Is this the same thing that the blushing little Mr Robinson ‘puts his money on’, and that later elicits in him an anguish of self-abasement? The word that dare not speak its name; that marks her as outside, as ‘not a very great novelist’; that leaves something out, something missing; lacking humanity. Consciously or not, Jameson has “heard” the lesbianism implicit in the text. She has read, in both Woolf’s and Jauss’s sense, taking pleasure in understanding, though pleasure in this instance appears to outweigh understanding. Deflecting her pleasure through “little Mr Robinson”, Jameson gains recomposure from her passionate outburst, and stands aloof, conceding that Woolf is ‘cursed with double vision’ (245). Not unlike the men who dismissed the text, Jameson

has projected her own gender fantasies onto Woolf. It is not Jameson – oscillating her vision through little Mr Robinson – but Woolf who has double vision.

Not quite able to dismiss Woolf altogether, her final words are:

Yet Mrs Woolf remains the most remarkable figure among all those to whom Mr Robinson's insistent respectful gestures have, bless the man, been drawing our attention for the last hour.
(245)

Mr Robinson's "little" has been automatically dropped since Jameson has restored what was missing.

Mortimer's prediction that 'soon some young lady is sure to caricature Mrs Woolf's methods' appears to have manifested four months later in this review of Jameson's. Woolf invented a biographer to tell Orlando's story, and Jameson has reproduced this function in her invented "common man" to mediate her response to the text. What both strategies mimic is the conventional resort of women to the masculine modes of address and reception in order to self-express in fiction. To communicate through literature women have coded their desires through the very structures that have served to separate them socially and politically. Woolf analyses this practice in *A Room of One's Own* in her assertion of the hypothetical relationship that 'Chloe liked Olivia'. In Jameson's review the choice to hide behind Mr Robinson also works to free her from acknowledging and articulating the desires she discerns in the text. The mask of Mr Robinson ('bless the man') affords her the ambivalence of taking pleasure in Woolf's text and in what it envisions, free from the responsibility of declaring (to herself or her readers) an allegiance to those desires.

Woolf had earlier articulated the problem for women, in reviewing and writing literature, of entering into a masculine domain.⁸ She termed the "angel in the house" the figure of self-betrayal who looked over Woolf's shoulder when she reviewed a text written by a man, to ensure she considered his feelings at the expense of saying what she really needed to. She remarks that women are 'impeded by the extreme conventionality of the other sex'; that men allow themselves freedoms they deny to women, and how difficult it is for both women and men to recognise this. In these reviews of *Orlando* the different perspectives brought to Woolf's texts are palpably related to the gender self-identifications of the reviewers. The confidence with which

⁸ In 'Professions for Women', a speech written for the London/National Society for Women's Service in January 1931.

the men declaim and disclaim about genius and talent, and the askance perspectives of the women, make it clear that the function of this criticism is the regulation and reproduction of defining practices of masculine subjectivity.

The salient point in the foregoing analysis is about critical self-consciousness. The problem with the reviewers' response to *Orlando* lies not in their criticisms but in their refusal (mostly) to acknowledge their own part in the reception of the text. Of course the bedrock issue of gender identification, arguably the single most devastating challenge issued by the text, is notoriously fraught with unconscious identifications and allegiances. To be aware of one's stance as perspectival (rather than "natural") diminishes the grounds for criticism of the text's aesthetics. In other words, to understand gender (and other) identifications as questions of context and choice, and not the immutable truth that these reviewers implicitly, and explicitly, suggest, is largely the point of the text. If you get it, you do not need to retaliate against it. While reading perspectives are passed off unchallenged as truth, resistance is improbable; but if critical emphasis is placed increasingly on the relationship between textual aesthetics and textual reception then responsibility is shifted, and reception produces a process of dialogic interaction. *Orlando's* textual practice contrasts directly with *The Well of Loneliness*. In its plaintive "normality" *The Well of Loneliness* rhetorically hands over its power to the masculinised reader, enabling the condescension it begs to be freed from. From this centrality the reader is authorised to generously bestow, or to imperiously withhold, acceptance of the text's terms. *Orlando* ungenders its reader by decentralising masculine subjectivity. The masculine subject – whether a man or a woman – is not afforded the usual position from which to bestow or withhold; rather, his very position is the subject of the text. To interact with the text in some kind of mutual constitutiveness involves articulating the positionality of authority, and, more effectively, *experiencing* it as positional.

CONCLUSION

Through close textual analysis I have advanced Woolf's *Orlando* as a composite intersubjective aesthetic, with its ironising frame, complex and desiring structure of address and detailed characterisation of present-moment consciousness. Yet the contemporary reviews of *Orlando* offered repeat instances of that negating reception that (as I argued in Chapter 2) weakened Sedgwick and Butler's speech act theory regarding queer self-avowal. In Chapter 2 I examined the legal response to the Ball Queens' intellectual property rights in *Paris is Burning*, the legal responses to the gender self-avowal of pre- and post-operative transgenderists, and in a more anecdotal

analysis (in the Introduction), the response of the park assailants to my avowed gender ambiguity. The argument constituted through these analyses has been that the reception of self-avowed subjectivity can readily negate the utterance in the specific context of its utterance. But the self-avowal of identity politics and the textual effects of *Orlando* differ over the function of reading. Those reviews of *Orlando*, taken together, reveal a practice of reading that is buried in normative culture. They do this within the overt context of reading – the activity of reading literature – *per se*. Whereas reading is foregrounded in those reviews, “reading”, in the Ball Queens’ sense, within legal and social discourses goes on covertly. The context of reading literature presents an obvious forum for a meta-analysis of the act itself; by contrast, the act of “reading” in a legal context is masked by the normative presumptions made about the subject standing before the Law. Interpreting history and reviving tradition are practised in all of these contexts, legal, social, literary. But the literary, in this sense, is the only domain in which reading constitutes both the subject and the object of focus. For this reason I treat it as an optimum site for analysis of processes of subjectivity.

If the “common reader” in modernity has been distinguished foremost by the masculine gender, then the relationship between reading, masculinity, and subjectivity must be understood for any really sustainable shift in the engendering processes and effects of cultural practices. The textual aesthetics of *Orlando* structure a relational and ungeneric reader. Although these effects were frequently met by dramatisations of confusion and condescension by its contemporary reviewers – were negated in the above sense – the literary critical context of such responses foregrounds their agenda and renders visible to analysis the processes that are drawn on to silence subjective differences.

A sharper focus on reading practices as perspectival (contextually embedded, agentially impacted) has a greater chance of dissolving the ideological function of the masculinised reader. This dissolution can enforce a more relational dimension to cultural production and consumption, enabling a relinquishing of the cultural habit of subject-object relations and in its place a more sophisticated and subtle awareness of intersubjectivity. Crucial to this process is not only an intellectual understanding of the difference between subject-object and intersubjective relations, but a capacity for experiential enactment of intersubjectivity. This is a cultural version of the scientific evolution from a static newtonian to a dynamic quantum-physical perspective. What the contemporary reviewers of *Orlando* exemplified was not simply a refusal of intersubjectivity but more explicitly an inability to act with any competence from a

decentralised position. The construal of intersubjectivity as a possibility for cultural meaning-making constitutes a frame from which to reduce the automatic action of unconscious negation of subjective differences. A renewed focus on reading practices is central to the conditions necessary for a practice of negotiated subjectivities; it serves to emphasise the elements of choice and determination operative in the practice of reading. This continues the intellectual work from across the twentieth century in the sustained shift of perspective from the centrality of truth to the subjectiveness of truth-making.

In the current fashion of the proliferation of identities it is important to articulate one's own attachment to the delusory gender binaries that precede and reproduce subjects. Proliferation *per se* is not a sufficient condition for comprehensive structural reformations of subjectivity. The transgressiveness of s/m, for example, was seen (in Chapter 3) to be deeply invested in sustaining polarity, both in its relationship to psychoanalysis and in its recitation of the gendering of power. It is more important that we understand those impulses to act out of gender identification unconsciously at those moments where we claim to be transgressing its laws. As an ironic manifestation of quantum thought, feminism in the twentieth century has moved in waves that collapse over the persistent drive toward singularities (a 'particle' for its identity politics). The 1970s second-wave feminist reception of Woolf's sought its direction from Woolf's gender and felt cheated by her apparent androgynous vision. In the final chapter I work with receptions of Woolf that target the specific relations of gender and sex/uality in her texts.

6 "AN UNKNOWN QUANTITY": WOOLF, DESIRE AND THE CHALLENGE OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY

1 A FEMINIST RECEPTION OF WOOLF

Woolf and feminism are intricately connected if not synonymous terms in many strands of feminist literary criticism. When Woolf proposed that women look back through mothers to create a feminine lineage – and thus invoke the authority to write ourselves into history – she would hardly have imagined herself taking the lead role as first mother of literary feminism. Yet, casting about for a matrilineage, much feminist scholarship sought its origin myth in Woolf's work.¹ Feminist receptions of Woolf have been predominantly organised conceptually around the subjective aesthetic Woolf's texts offer feminism. Woolf's own political aesthetics, however, have proven to be an obstacle to this quest. Feminisms are now more attuned to self-situating in their variant historical contexts, but when *Orlando*, and often synonymously, Woolf, has been read by feminism, it is less in terms of a specific aesthetic or literary impact – as neo or modernist – than as type or genre of feminine subjectivity. To the extent that I read *Orlando* for its subjective aesthetics I participate in this method of reception. My argument, however, co-emergent with other projects of rethinking *Orlando* through the framework of its sexual politics, is not reliant on a quest for the singularity of identity.² In this chapter I analyse some of the initial receptions of Woolf by feminist literary scholars, and more recent receptions, with the aim of intervening in the questions that feminisms might profitably ask of Woolf's aesthetics.

¹ Burns echoes the point made by Bette London that by now 'Woolf has become the American feminist's favourite cultural icon, the mother to whom we turn in hope of finding a mirror of ourselves' (1994: 343). Though Burns writes from a North American context her comment applies at least to the UK and Australia. Her article argues how that reception of Woolf is simplistic in its efforts to 'fix her identity as one identity alone' (343).

² Other receptions of *Orlando*, consulted for this chapter, that address its sexual politics include: Boxwell (1998), Parkes (1994), Pinauck (1997), Piggford (1997) and Watkins (1998).

Woolf wrote *Orlando* with what could be understood retrospectively as a feminist orientation, but what gives the text its edge is the desire that structures and motivates it. This desire has been construed by earlier feminist receptions as a question of gender, at the expense of sexual politics: as a utopian, even dystopian, refusal of gender difference. For this reason I begin the analysis by addressing some problems in feminist receptions of Woolf's purported advocacy of an androgynous ideal. The structures of desire informing Woolf's subjective aesthetics complicate the possible meanings of androgyny in her texts. I argue that rather than compromising feminist subjectivity, Woolf's textual androgyny can be read as the mechanics of a feminist structure of address. Moving from androgyny to the question of lesbian desire in *Orlando*, and in the relationship that motivated the text, I consider the possibilities and limitations of collocating Woolf's biography with her textual aesthetics in *Orlando*. Taking the "unknown quantity", from those questions of desire, into the uncertainty of address, I complete the analysis with emphasis on feminist structures of address.

1.1 Androgyny

The most obvious source of feminist critics' disputation over Woolf's ideal of androgyny is *A Room of One's Own*. Prompted by observing a man and woman getting into a taxi together the narrator takes this sight as a visual representation of an ideal fusion of male and female. She imagines that just such a fusion illustrates Coleridge's notion that a great mind is androgynous. Arguing that sex-consciousness is fatal to the creative instinct both in men and in women, the text attributes to androgyny the works of "great" artists including Shakespeare and Proust (Woolf, 1929: 104-108). Taken superficially, or read literally, this focus on androgyny has been understood as a romantic search for wholeness, a reconciliation of opposites.

In Woolf's texts however, there is little evidence of endorsement of the metaphysical truth of gender dimorphism. This poses significant problems to the feminist project of inheriting from Woolf a feminist subject. Given the place of Woolf as foremost literary feminist mother, perhaps the metaphor here would be more aptly one of birth (Woolf engendering a feminist subject) rather than of property (inheriting from Woolf a feminist subject). At times, Woolf's works have been regarded collectively, read backward onto her life, and deemed irresponsible in their androgyny; in their apparent refusal, that is, of a feminist subject for feminist analysis. Elaine Showalter's response is possibly the most influential in this construction of Woolf, though it comes later than the special issue of *Women's Studies* in 1974 on androgyny where feminist positions were predominantly critical of androgyny. Showalter's argument in 'Virginia Woolf and the flight into androgyny' rejects Woolf's formal aesthetics and regrets that

feminism can only properly read texts such as *Orlando* and *A Room Of One's Own* by detaching from their narrative strategies, strategies characterised negatively as 'repetition, exaggeration, parody, whimsy, and multiple viewpoint' (Showalter, 1977: 282).³ Showalter laments that Woolf's implicitly modernist "impersonality" in *A Room of One's Own* is a function of defensiveness and represents a rejection of her "experience" as a woman. The tactical error of this kind of feminism was to seek its feminine subjectivity in the radical texts of Woolf. From the perspective of essential gender difference, feminism will inevitably fail, and be failed by, Woolf's texts. When feminist discourse persists with the metaphysical truth of gender dimorphism it is inevitable too that this perspective will misconstrue challenges to that belief as idealisations, fantasies of transcendence, flights into androgyny. Unwittingly reproducing Freud, Showalter worries that androgyny renders individuals eunuchs. Just as Showalter took experience as the guarantee of gender authenticity against the territorial invasions of cross-dressers (discussed in Chapter 1), here she challenges Woolf to speak (anachronistically) from her experiences of alienation as a woman. In her insistence on experience as a shared and effectively preordained set of emotions and desires common to women, and whose expression is essential for the feminist project, Showalter misses what is a potentially more radical construal of experience. Deploying the currently debased form-and-content approach to literary analysis Showalter requires a coherent feminist subject describing understood experiences – such as 'anger and ambition' – in order for feminism to have subversive effect (264). Entering with an agenda, searching for substance, she leaves Woolf's texts having failed to perceive the more radical enactment of experience in Woolf's subjective aesthetics.

In the period where androgyny was deplored as a hindrance to the feminist project of establishing and valorising the difference of femininity from the hitherto generic masculinity, Nancy Topping Bazin produced in 1973 a curious defense of androgyny in Woolf's work, in *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision*. Her introductory chapter 'A Quest for Equilibrium' assesses Woolf's notion of androgyny as a function of her individual psychology; a struggle to reconcile her internalised mother and father. Drawing from testimonial writings of manic-depressive John Custance, Bazin aligns the manic states with femininity and the depressive with masculinity, thus understanding Woolf's androgynous vision as a quest for the balanced self. For Bazin androgynous subjectivity corresponds to the truer self. In its causal reading of the texts as a direct effect of Woolf's psychology this defence is of course situated within the

³ For further discussion of this reception of Woolf see Moi (1985), especially her introductory chapter 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?'.

same structure of analysis as the critics of Woolf's androgyny, all of which collapse Woolf's texts with assumptions about her gendered identity. A more thoroughgoing analysis of androgyny around the same period is Heilbrun (1964) *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*. Although she too treats androgyny as a literal position of internalising the unification of self-evident differences, Heilbrun at least politicises gender. By considering a shift away from gender dimorphism as a feasible political choice, rather than a question limited to individual psychology (Bazin, 1973) or a flight from feminism into transcendent impersonality (Showalter, 1977), Heilbrun advances the debates in a direction more sympathetic with and attentive to Woolf's subjective aesthetics.

Related critical responses from second-wave feminism have regarded Woolf's androgyny as a poetic fable and comic myth (DiBattista, 1980), a temporary metaphor signifying the transcendence of sex (Rose, 1978), utopian, contradictory and politically problematic (Sypher, in Ginsberg & Moss Gottlieb, eds, 1983) and a wish fulfillment (Poole, 1990). The embedded anxieties about undoing gender dimorphism, in the critiques of androgyny, surface plainly in discussions that causally link androgyny with suicide. Bazin and Showalter both make this connection, though for opposite arguments. Where Bazin interprets Woolf's suicide as an act of faith, gesturing toward androgyny, Showalter regards Woolf's suicide as evidence that she is a failure of androgyny (1977: 278). The association of the refusal of gender dimorphism with the consequence of philosophical or literal death, has been repeated in the different cultural texts examined across this thesis. From perspectives informed by poststructuralist theories, feminist critics including Moi (1985), Jacobus (1986) and Minow-Pinkney (1987) have rethought Woolf's androgyny as a rebuttal of metaphysical categories of the unified self in favour of a concept of mind characterised by heterogeneity. These positions account well for the broader gestures of subjectivity in Woolf's aesthetics, but can lose the specificities of same-sex desire that, in her case, condition the aesthetic. In the context of androgyny it is clear that persistent attachment to gender dimorphism beleaguers feminist no less than anti-feminist analyses. While arguments that work against dimorphism continue to risk reductive interpretation as utopian, ahistorical, and anti-materialist, it is clear that feminists too have much invested in the compromised gendered subjectivity produced in gender dimorphism. This inevitably invokes the question of sexuality that often silently powers these debates.

In the text of *Orlando* Orlando's spontaneous change of sex from male to female, and correspondingly from man to woman, provides the strategy for a textual aesthetics of subjectivity that refuses to conflate gender appellation with the experience of

subjective agency. The narrator advances this analysis of the sex change: 'Orlando had become a woman – there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity' (Woolf, 1928: 133). The altered future for Orlando is to do precisely with the cultural receptions of her gender, as distinct from, and often in opposition to, her own experience of subjectivity. The unaltered identity is thus articulated to create space between gender and identity. The past for Orlando as a woman, however, is unchanged: 'His memory – but in future we must, for convention's sake, say "her" for "his", and "she" for "he" – her memory then, went back through all the events of her past life without encountering any obstacle' (133). This unbroken memory and catalogue of past desires allows Orlando as a woman in the twentieth century when buying sheets for a double bed to recall with a pang the faithless Sasha, and to be shocked to find Sasha now 'grown so fat; so lethargic' (289). Through the change of sex and overt distinction between identity and gender the text ruptures the culturally imperative linearity of sex, gender and sexuality. Orlando can have remnant desire as a woman for the woman (Sasha) she desired when a man.

The play of sex, gender and sexuality in *Orlando* distinguishes between gender and sexuality in the manner of late twentieth-century theories of sexuality. Woolf's occasional referencing of androgyny in the 1920s is intelligible now as a parallel to the disarticulation in 1990s discourses of sexuality of the categories of sex/gender and sex/uality. Piggford sites Woolf as the originator, in *Orlando*, of 'a specifically female tradition of androgynous gender performance' (1997: 48). Through the figure of the 'female camp androgyne', he argues, the separation of sex from gender produces 'a particular disorientation in the reader', creating a 'camp effect' (53) and it is a matter of the reader's will and competence whether they can decode the camp aesthetic (57).⁴ Current trends toward freeing discourses of sex/uality from the framework of gender dimorphism enable a reading of Woolf's "androgynous ideal" no longer as an idealistic

⁴ My only argument with Piggford is with his assumption of a real gender beneath the camp performance, as when as he says, about Annie Lennox's drag performances, 'though much of this look is based on male-associated coding, she is also recognizable in the video as "essentially" female; that is, it is clear that Annie is a woman performing androgyny' (1997: 40). In fact, as Piggford notes, it was not at all clear to the MTV producers who terminated transmission of another of Lennox's drag videos in the middle of its first broadcast in 1983 and banned her videos until her gender was unquestionably established (41). It still seems to be the case that Butler's concept of performance when rendered literally, as Piggford does, can generate a camp hermeneutic through which performance becomes little more than a tragic (because impossible) hope of movement away from gender dimorphism. If we "know" that Annie is an "essentially" female woman performing androgyny, we're really just allowing her a little rope instead of accepting the challenge about our fundamental assumptions that the performance and performer are distinct.

desire to escape the "truth" of gender dimorphism, but as a means from which to articulate desire free from the foundationalist unconscious of gender dimorphism.

Mainstream models of lesbian desire in Woolf's context, most famously in Radcliffe Hall's endorsement of Havelock Ellis in *The Well of Loneliness*, drew from biological determinism to privilege the masculine over the feminine, conflating gender and sexuality to the detriment of lesbian subjectivity. Woolf's reluctance to identify her desire with a diminished model of lesbianism is understandable, even if she were not already developing a new antifoundationalist aesthetics of character. More radical theories around homosexuality were circulating within Bloomsbury. Where lesbianism was explained away as a kind of faux masculinity, the concept of androgyny presented an option for subjective self-determination. Homosexuality could be taken to express a fusion, rather than inversion, of masculine and feminine traits. Androgyny in this sense signified homosexuality to Woolf's contemporaries.⁵ The fusion of masculine and feminine traits, moreover, suggests agency: not an innate biological type, but a creative process through which the homosexual subject produces new space in which to enter intelligibly into discourse.

If *A Room of One's Own* theorises androgyny as a strategic escape from gender dimorphism by creating the third term, *Orlando* refuses dimorphism through its performance of a newer form of subjectivity best understood in terms of its refusals and contextualisations. The narrative momentum in *Orlando* shifts from the object focus of the narrator to the increasingly subjective focus of the character, Orlando. In this sense the text dramatises a shift in perspective from the pseudo-objective stance of the narrative voice to the plural subjectivities of the character. Orlando becomes intelligible less from the external designations of gender, class, age, and such, and more from her own subjective agency as the narrator's epistemological certainty diminishes.

1.2 The Unknown Quantity: lesbianism in *Orlando*

Orlando is motivated by and dedicated to Woolf's lover, Vita Sackville-West. Radical representational possibilities exist through the text's narrative strategy. In this section I read the text's formal aesthetics alongside the relationship of desire between Woolf and Vita Sackville-West. I reference that relationship in the way that Tomashevsky referred to the use of biography (in Chapter 4): for its literary function. If the relationship between Woolf and Sackville-West has become central to *Orlando*'s reception then it is an indispensable component of the text for my analysis.

⁵ For discussion on this relationship between androgyny and homosexuality see Rosenman (1989) and Fassler (1979).

Tomashevsky's point is enlightening for the effects of Woolf's "ideal biography" on the reception of her texts. His reference to the biography as "ideal" makes clear the futility and undesirability of seeking access to the "real" through biography. In this chapter I use Woolf's biography (narrated in her letters and by biographers such as Lee) in two ways. I have examined how the initial feminist receptions of Woolf were mediated by their biographical location of Woolf. In Tomashevsky's sense, the texts did not illuminate the life, rather the life created the conditions for the reception of the text. The life itself thus acquired a textual function. Here I use the "ideal biography", in a second way, to consider the relationship of Woolf's own biography to *Orlando*, her "biography" of Vita-Sackville West. My reading of *Orlando* with Hermione Lee's biography of Woolf, and specifically with the relationship between Woolf and Sackville-West, is not intended to tell the "truth" of that relationship as it was carried out in real time, but rather to make sense of the reception of the text's arguably lesbian aesthetics. Thus, as Woolf's "ideal biography" has become integral to the receptions of her texts, I treat her biography textually. Rather than use Woolf's biography as a corrective to *Orlando*, as a source of evidence about the relationship with Sackville-West, I read it intertextually with *Orlando*. Such a methodology does not imply that Woolf did not exist in space-time and experience material and political constraints that informed the aesthetics across her *oeuvre*. Instead it acknowledges that whatever was "real" for Woolf is not accessible in an unmediated form. One has access only to the textualised "ideal biography" and thus the decisions one makes concerning what is undecidable about Woolf comprise one's own reception of her texts. In other words, choosing one way or another to read Woolf as feminist, heterosexual, lesbian, Modernist, mad, is not a function of Woolf but a function of Woolf's reception.

I begin with Sherron Knopp's lesbian-positive reading of *Orlando* to get to the question of what the relationship between the two women means for a reading of the text. Knopp (1992) reads the text as clearing representational space for lesbian desire. She discusses the disinterest (or misinterest) of critics in Vita Sackville-West's and Woolf's relationship in terms of *Orlando*, in the writing-out of their lesbianism. To understand its subversiveness, for Knopp, a reading 'must first get the relationship between Virginia and Vita right and then see it in context: what it meant to regard oneself as a lesbian (or, to use the term Virginia and Vita prefer, sapphist) and to engage in lesbian relationships in the 1920s and what it meant to *write* about one's perceptions and experiences' (113). *Orlando* emerges out of a more than usually troubled literary context for lesbian representation. Sackville-West had written *Challenge* in 1918-19 about, and during, her affair with Violet Trefussis. The story had become a public scandal and the families found the characters in the book, "Julian" and "Eve", too

identifiable and had the book withdrawn from publication in England (it was published in the USA in 1924). Another text dealing with sapphism was Radcliffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness* which appeared in 1927: it was declared obscene and was banned. It is no wonder then

that Vita was 'terrified' when Virginia conceived a book in which 'Sapphism [was] to be suggested', based on a personal involvement that was neither casual nor insignificant and focused on the life of a publicly known, easily identifiable "pronounced Sapphist". And it is no wonder that Virginia took special care in her strategy: 'I am writing Orlando half in a mock style very clear and plain, so that people will understand every word. But the balance between truth and fantasy must be careful'. (Knopp, 1992: 116-17)

For Knopp this is a text which celebrates Vita's "inverted" sexuality in a context of general public disapproval of sapphism. So how does it render intelligible and even acceptable what was elsewhere banned or derided? A key moment in the text, Orlando's change from man to woman, might answer this. The biographer narrator describes the change thus:

[m]any people...holding that such a change of sex is against nature, have been at great pains to prove (1) that Orlando had always been a woman, (2) that Orlando is at this moment a man. Let biologist and psychologists determine. It is enough for us to state the simple fact; Orlando was a man till the age of thirty; when he became a woman and has remained so ever since. (Woolf, 1928: 133-34)

Orlando's "condition" is not the pathologised one that Stephen Gordon finds in the pages of Krafft-Ebing nor answered in Freud as arrested development, but 'a simple natural fact' (Knopp, 1992: 123).⁶ The text's refusal of narratives of pathology, '[l]et biologist and psychologists determine [i]t is enough for us to state the simple fact', is not presented as an idealistic refusal of uncomfortable cultural truths but a suggestive shift from questions of origin (the province of biology and psychology) to questions of effects, rendered legitimate within the ironised authorising frame of biography which gestures to its reception and readership via the consensual pronoun "us" ('it is enough

⁶ Though Woolf's Hogarth Press published Freud's work, her critical position toward Freud and psychoanalysis is hinted at in a letter to Molly McCarthy in 1924. Rephrasing from a case study a contrived association between impotence, red ink, conjugal rites, claret and madness, she says 'and yet these Germans think it proves something - besides their own gull-like imbecility' (cited in Knopp: 122). It was not until 1939 that Woolf met Freud. He was in the UK having fled nazism, and in their meeting psychoanalysis, sexuality and authoritarianism combine. In a self-conscious gesture (and a backhanded assessment of Woolf) Freud presented her with a narcissus flower, and they discussed Hitler. It was only after that meeting that she began to read his works.

for us to state'). The ironised figure of the biographer narrator mobilises the enunciation of difference from a *recognisable*, if distorted prediscursive structure. In operating a recognisable framework that nevertheless bears traces of its own instability, *Orlando* renders intelligible the shifting gendered, sexed, and sexualised identities of the always already discursive eponymous subject. Having established that reading *Orlando* requires 'getting right' the relationship between Woolf and Sackville-West, Knopp concludes 'What Virginia gave Vita in the book that started as a joke and continued seriously until it shoved everything else out of the way is the first positive, and still unsurpassed, sapphic portrait in literature' (127). Parkes (1994) makes a similar case in his focus on the important distinctions between *Well* and *Orlando* for getting lesbian desire into print. He considers that *Well* failed because of its 'discourse of sincerity' (436) in trying to establish lesbianism as a sad factual presence in an otherwise naturally heterosexual reality. Woolf, by contrast, 'exploits the theatrical properties of sexual identity to create a whole world of performance that renders the rhetoric of sincerity ever more doubtful' (436-37). Thus Woolf's vacillation around sapphism in *Orlando* enables the playful expression of lesbian desire. I accept the positive reading of performance here but contend that such Butlerian performative readings do not go far enough with Woolf. Although Woolf does play with gender as performance in *Orlando* – gender has no stable location in action, clothing, external referencing – she takes subjectivity beyond gender performativity. Performativity is a stage in *Orlando*, not the whole argument.

Knopp's argument is an advance on the more heterocentric and prescriptive responses of Showalter's genre of feminism, yet it relies on creating certainty out of uncertainty to make its point about lesbian desire. If understanding *Orlando*'s subversiveness, requires one to 'first get the relationship between Virginia and Vita right and then see it in context', you could expect to get it right through recourse to the manifold letters and biographies between and about the two women. Yet even Hermione Lee's mammoth biographical effort, deemed variously by its reviewers as 'the most satisfyingly complete account of Woolf's life and work to date', 'the book to read about Virginia Woolf', 'A superlative critical achievement', 'the definitive Virginia Woolf biography', cannot unambiguously 'get it right'.⁷ An examination of the many letters and "evidence" about Woolf and Sackville-West gathered and evaluated by Lee reveals nothing so much as complexity and indeterminate surmise. The letters between them may be deemed so coded as to neutralise the sexuality of the relationship between the women. They may have been so effective as to dupe not only their contemporaries but later analysts to believe that two women could share such intimacy without the

⁷ Reviewers' quotes are taken from the inside front pages of Lee (1996).

relationship being sexual or lesbian (assuming that "sexual" and "lesbian" guarantee each other's status). Alternatively, Sackville-West may well have been too philandering, or Woolf too frigid or phobic, for the idealised lesbian relationship of Knopp's analysis. Recourse to Lee's text proliferates the possibilities, even as Lee's own implicit response to the relationship mediates her argument.⁸

Whatever status (truth, obfuscation, game) one affords the letters between Woolf, Sackville-West, and friends about the two – and not infrequently the letters contradict each other – they are the key point of access to their own narrative of the relationship. Inevitably that narrative is a contested one, not least between the women themselves. Neither do Woolf's texts provide clarity in that respect. I read *Orlando* for the representational possibilities it creates for intersubjectivity, and its concurrent and impressively anarchic treatment of categories of certainty. While professing disinterest in locating Woolf's texts in her "life" (in the manner of Showalter, for instance), I acknowledge that the aesthetics of desire that structure *Orlando* insist on the relevance of the relationship between Woolf and Sackville-West. To this end I use Woolf's biography in Tomashevsky's sense (see Chapter 4) as "ideal", textual, and already implicated in the receptions of Woolf that I address. Though *Orlando*'s referent is Vita Sackville-West in its subject and in its address, it is immaterial to my argument whether the relationship between Woolf and Sackville-West was lesbian in a twenty-first century understanding of the term. Instead I work with the desire that structures the aesthetics of the text. Through a reading of Lee's inevitably selective referencing of letters and subjective interpretations of the two women, I argue for a powerful if uneasily classifiable desire that Woolf deployed through *Orlando* to radical effect.

Letters written by Woolf and Sackville-West are no guarantee either way whether the affair existed much beyond their imaginations: the flirtations in their letters are as indicative of game playing as of coy allusion to desires acted upon. In the letters Woolf

⁸ Lee proffers a more conservative reading of the relationship between Woolf and Sackville-West, taking at face value the importance of their respective marriages over their relationship with each other. Nonetheless, she allows for some uncertainty in the relative emotional investments of the complex of relations (as becomes obvious in my discussion). And just as Knopp's overt reading-in of unmitigated lesbian relations between the women leaves a residue of uncertainty about them, so Lee's caution ("homophobia" might be an unfair assessment of her method in this instance), falls short of sealing off the question altogether. It is not to say that either critic fails in their projects; inevitably it is a function in equal parts of the goals of critical biography and of the specificities of the subjects in question. Thus I work with Lee's biography despite, not because of, its resort to evidence and the real. Letters cannot speak for themselves, and Lee has her own motives and perspectives on her material. Yet, for its sheer mass of research, Lee's biography is a valuable resource for my reading of *Orlando*. I use the biographical and autobiographical narratives of Woolf's life and work, that compete in Lee's text, to advance my own reading of the desire that will not speak its name unequivocally, despite all the promptings and limitations of the many critics who engage Woolf biographically.

tends to hide behind her marriage, and Sackville-West behind Woolf's "madness", from the desire they nonetheless articulate to friends, husbands and each other. In 1926, the year the affair was at full tilt, Woolf explained her reticence in terms of fear: 'you'll be tired of me one of these days (I'm so much older) and so I have to take my little precautions. That's why I put the emphasis on "recording" rather than feeling' (in Nicolson & Trautman, eds, 1977, Vol. 3: 302). Protecting her feelings with the defence of analysis it is no wonder that Woolf found it hard to get through to Sackville-West. In the same letter Woolf accuses her of hiding something – in her relations, in her writing – of obscurity, of being 'reserved, muted', lacking 'central transparency'.

Woolf's "madness" was used as a protection against the relationship by Leonard, Nicholson and Sackville-West herself, who saw the effects on Woolf of their physical intimacy. On one occasion after spending a night alone with Sackville-West at Long Barn, Woolf collapsed with a minor nervous breakdown on her return home. In a letter to Harold Nicholson in 1926, and to assuage his anxiety about the affair, Sackville-West says 'I am scared to death of arousing physical feelings in her, because of the madness', and suggests 'there is something incongruous and almost indecent in the idea' of a sexual relationship with Woolf, despite having already "gone to bed" with her '(twice) but that's all' (in Nicolson, ed., 1992: 158-59). Lee cautions 'the version she gave Harold may not be the whole truth. And Harold was not altogether convinced' (Lee, 1996: 503). The incongruity Sackville-West mentions appeared to lie between their idealisations of each other and the fact of their sexual attraction. According to Sackville-West, in the same letter to Nicholson, the relationship between Woolf and Leonard was not sexual: 'she has never lived with anyone but Leonard, which was a terrible failure, and was abandoned quite soon. So all that remains is an unknown quantity'.⁹ In this context, Woolf's collapse can be read as a manifestation of the material push to collapse terms; an effect of the anxiety (of Nicholson and Leonard Woolf, but perhaps also of Sackville-West and Woolf) around the indeterminate nature – the unknown quantity – of the women's relationship.

By the end of 1926 Woolf had finished *To the Lighthouse* and went for a second visit to Knole – Sackville-West's, and later implicitly Orlando's, estate. Already, according to Lee, it was 'the beginning of her transformation of Vita, "quite easily", into a fiction' (506). A few months later she vacillates once again in a letter to Sackville-West:

⁹ Sackville-West and Nicholson coded their letters and "lived with" seems to refer to having sex. It is faintly ludicrous that speculation about whether the relationship between the two women was lesbian has been measured strictly according to whether or not it was sexual. If the same standards were applied to Woolf's relationship with Leonard Woolf, presumptions about their heterosexuality would be equally "suspect".

Why do I think of you so incessantly, see you so clearly the moment I'm in the least discomfort? An odd element in our friendship. Like a child, I think if you were here, I should be happy. Talking to Lytton [Strachey] the other night he suddenly asked me to advise him in love – whether to go on, over the precipice, or stop short at the top. Stop, stop! I cried, thinking instantly of you. Now what would happen if I let myself go over? Answer me that. Over what? you'll say. A precipice marked V. (In Nicolson & Trautman, eds, 1977, Vol. 3: 352)

Where Showalter might have been accurate in critiquing Woolf's avoidance of intense experience (her opting to 'stop short at the top'), she is inaccurate in perceiving this avoidance in Woolf's texts: the vacillating desires, the advances and retreats, the obsessions and flirtations, along with the suggestion of "Sapphism" that Woolf intended for the text, all leave traces through *Orlando*. Already in the letter Sackville-West is part of the fiction, attributed dialogue by Woolf ('Over what? you'll say'). The image of going over a 'precipice marked V' reinforces in its coded, if simplistic, reference to female sex, and its suggestion of "jumping the fence", the "Sapphism" that she stopped short of experientially but revelled in textually. This was the year in which Woolf began to write *Orlando*.

In the middle of 1927, as Woolf was planning the text and recovering from the success of the sales of *To the Lighthouse*, she lay in bed at Rodmell with a headache for three weeks. During this time she read Sackville-West's erotic novel *Challenge*, about the scandalous relationship with Violet Trefussis. Solicitous of Woolf's illness Sackville-West wrote frequently. In one letter she tells Woolf how she had fantasised driving to Rodmell from Kent in the middle of the night, throwing gravel at Woolf's window and staying till dawn. 'But, you being you, I can't, more's the pity...For a different Virginia I'd fly to Sussex in the night' (in de Salvo & Leaska, eds, 1984: 229). Lee describes how Woolf was "stung" by 'the clear implication that she could never give Vita the kind of erotic excitement described in her banned novel. "Come then", she wired – but Vita didn't' (Lee, 1996: 508). After that episode Woolf writes to Sackville-West:

You see I was reading *Challenge* & I thought your letter was a challenge 'if only you weren't so elderly & valetudinarian' was what you said in effect 'we would be spending the day together' whereupon I wired 'come then' to which naturally there was no answer and a good thing too I daresay as I am elderly and valetudinarian – it's no good disguising the fact. Not even reading *Challenge* will alter that. (In Nicolson & Trautman, eds, 1977, Vol. 3: 391)

Vita's refusal, by this stage, suggests her recognition of the fictive status of Woolf's letters, given Woolf's prevarications when they were together. As if to confirm this, the letter (above), which retrospectively sums up the episode, itself begins and ends it with fiction. Woolf had been reading *Challenge*, had taken Sackville-West's letter in terms of that text ('I thought your letter was a challenge'), and retreated to the text for proof of her sexual invalidity ('Not even reading *Challenge* will alter that'). Contrarily, if typically, she concludes the letter: 'I was very excited all day'. Sackville-West's expectations were waning, and in July 1927 she had begun and "confessed" to other affairs (Lee, 1996: 510). Despite apparently withholding herself sexually, Woolf was strangely jealous of Sackville-West's lovers (510).¹⁰ At the same time as she was coping with Sackville-West's affairs Woolf was approached with amorous intent by Philip Morrell. She found the incident 'grotesque, and faintly threatening' and turned it into a joke amongst her friends. These events apparently left her feeling not 'one thing or the other, not a man or a woman' (in Nicolson & Trautman, eds, 1977, Vol. 3: 401). After an outburst over Sackville-West's most recent affair, Woolf 'reclaimed Vita for her own purposes, and put to fertile use her sense of "not being a man or a woman"', commencing *Orlando* around October 1927 (Lee, 1996: 510).

In September 1928, a month before the publication of *Orlando*, and after much vacillation (in letters to Sackville-West about leaving Leonard for a week) Woolf and Sackville-West holidayed for a week in Burgundy, France. Woolf had been nervous about the trip, feeling 'excited, but afraid - she may find me out, I her out' (in Lee, 1996: 516). After finishing *Orlando* and before the trip she wrote to Sackville-West: 'The question now is, will my feelings for you be changed? I've lived with you all these months - coming out, what are you really like? Do you exist? Have I made you up?' (in Nicolson & Trautman, eds, 1977, Vol. 3: 474). On the holiday Woolf contrarily flirted with Sackville-West, expressing a preference for women, and yet overplayed the devoted wife who, guilty for "deserting Leonard" (with whom she fought on the day she departed with Sackville-West), spent anxious time writing to him

¹⁰ For Knopp, who takes Woolf and Sackville-West to be categorically lesbian, the critical practice of querying Woolf's sexuality is an expression of homophobia. Taking Woolf's letters at face value Knopp argues on the one hand that Woolf was as much a driving force behind the relationship as was Sackville-West, on the other that Woolf's sexual equivocations are immaterial to her lesbianism (Knopp, 1992: 113-16). While I share Knopp's interest in reading in, rather than obliterating, the sexual politics that motivated *Orlando*, I think Woolf's own phobia conditions the quizzical response of critics who seek to resolve the "unknown quantity". To explain the contrariness of Woolf's conclusion to her "Challenge" letter ('I was very excited all day') Knopp asserts, unsatisfactorily: 'For Virginia the stimulation of the mind provided pleasure as real and immediate as stimulation of the body' (1992: 115); and as if to clarify Woolf's jealousy of Sackville-West's lovers, explains 'if she could not play the role of Violet herself, she did not want anyone else to have it either' (115). Knopp applies these retrospective justifications to reinforce the case for lesbianism; but rather than elucidate the sexual politics of the text instead they beg the question.

and waiting to hear from him. Although she had fantasised about the holiday, musing in a letter to Sackville-West 'we might go to moonlight ruins, cafes, dances, plays, junketings; converse for ever; sleep only while the moon covers herself for an instant with a thin veil; and by day traipse the vineyards' (in Nicolson & Trautman, eds, 1977, Vol. 3: 529), in the event Woolf created anxiety around her separation from Leonard and seemed unable to cope with the time away and alone with Sackville-West that her desire had contrived. The trip seemed to answer affirmatively her own question of Sackville-West, 'Have I made you up?'

2 ADDRESSING WOMEN

The discourse of psychoanalysis has also confronted the problem of making a woman up, although with other investments than Woolf's. Felman's critical analysis of psychoanalysis and feminism, *What Does a Woman Want? Reading and sexual difference*, is an attempt to come to terms with the processes of reception for a feminist articulation of subjective difference. Her focus is on women's relationship to structures of address in the writing and telling of their stories. Her recourse to the relationship between Woolf and Sackville-West as a model for an articulation of women's desire brings her argument alongside mine on some points, making it useful for consideration here. Felman wants to reclaim Freud's notorious question as one that women can ask of themselves; to redefine women as the subject of their own desire. 'Can this question engender, through the literary or the psychoanalytic work, a woman's voice as its speaking subject?'.¹¹

Felman's stated aim is to encounter new ways of reading and of listening to literature and to psychoanalysis — to interpose a woman's voice and amplify resistances that are textually latent. The resistances are to the feminine axis of sexual difference as it is preconceived, in Freud's question, from masculine subject positions. Her argument thus treads the tenuous line of assenting to the "reality" of sexual difference and attempting to discover its feminine pole through the articulations of a desiring feminine subject. Her method is not to read *as* a woman, not to bring an *a priori* subject to the text, but to become a woman through the engendering process of reading. Her notions of reading are framed by reference to Woolf, with whom she opens and closes the argument in the book. My position clearly takes an opposite direction insofar as I discern in Woolf's textual aesthetics the potential for the process of *disengendering* the reader. The intersubjective processes of *Orlando* come at the expense of the foundationality of gender identification. If reading necessarily equates to reading *as* a man, then Felman's strategy to wilfully listen out for and interpose women's voices

¹¹ Taken from the publicity blurb on the back cover.

into the process is politically astute. But her position emerges inside an allegiance to gender dimorphism. If, by contrast, reading *as* a man is the effect of a practice of subject-object relations in the construction of meaning, then to produce intersubjective readings does not symmetrically produce a feminine subject. Instead it produces a relation in a different register to sexual difference, precisely because sexual difference is an effect of subject-object relations. Felman allows for this parenthetically when she describes how a woman, through the interaction of writing and reading 'becomes (somewhat interminably) ... (perhaps never quite sufficiently) a woman' (1993: 12).

Her emphasis on women's voices and the articulation of a feminine desiring subject leads to an analysis of structures of address. Here I draw from Felman's analysis of address what is salient for an understanding of the gendering processes of address and reception. Her analysis is relevant, moreover, for its reference to both Woolf and Sackville-West as writers crucially invested in notions of address and reception. An address is 'not merely an act of intellectual and emotional appeal. It is an *act of empowerment*' through which women transmit their own metaphoricity to one another (127). Address, for Felman, however, requires an actual reader, yet this must inevitably be an "unknown quantity". She acknowledges this problem in discussion of Sackville-West's autobiography. Does the autobiography address Violet Trefussis? Harold Nicholson? Her mother ('as its censor and its conventional (mis)reader')? (132) Feminine autobiography, she argues, is trying to narrate this point: 'we do not always know who is *the real addressee* of the text of our desire and of the writing of our life'. To read autobiographically is thus to "bear witness" or "give testimony", to render intelligible, the "feminine resistance" in a given text (132-33). From this perspective, the feminist reader does not decide in advance to find this resistance, rather she comes upon it as a surprise that resonates with desires, forces and events in her own life.

While Felman's analysis of reading autobiographically is a nuanced account that sees autobiography not as a genre – confessional, literal, or otherwise – but as a strategic reading aesthetic, it still implicitly posits a congruence of sex, gender and the authorial voice that Woolf is careful to disrupt. In contrast to the autobiography of Sackville-West, Woolf's pseudo-biography of her produces the effect of a desiring subject without producing femininity as a foundational position. In *Orlando*, to narrate the biography of a contemporary woman Woolf had to return to the origins of the subject – both to the rise of the Sackvilles, as well as to the cartesian subject – and disabuse its unities (philosophical, historical, gender, the "I") in order to reach the subject *as* a subject in the present, unconstrained by those earlier epistemological paradigms. The biography, moreover, inevitably intersects with the autobiographical event of Woolf's

same-sex desire. It is also the autobiography of Woolf's experience of the assumption of a desiring subjectivity not structured by gender dimorphism. The relationship between biography and autobiography, between Sackville-West and Woolf, in this instance is mutually constitutive; it dramatises and is the organising principle of non-dimorphic subjectivity, presenting the possible structuration of intersubjectivity. *Orlando* may not be a text about lesbians but it is motivated and structured by desire between women. The earlier feminist reception that chided Woolf for her failure to represent feminine subjective experience and subjectivity, came at Woolf's texts as a subject to an object. Felman, by contrast, zeroes in on Woolf's textual aesthetics to discern an intersubjective relation for feminine subjectivity. Both methods, however, still cleave to the truth of gender difference that Woolf undoes.

Pidduck's reading of Sally Potter's *Orlando* takes up the issue of structures of address and begins to gesture toward, without naming as such, an intersubjective aesthetic in the visual representation of Woolf's text. According to Pidduck, Potter screens Woolf's intersubjective aesthetics through the device of Orlando's/Tilda Swinton's direct address to the camera/audience with mute looks at critical junctures (1997: 179-84). Her main example is Orlando's mute look to the camera in response to the publisher's question about how long it took to produce her draft manuscript. The irony and triumph of the moment, which is a symbolic culmination of centuries of struggle by women to write themselves into the literary historical public sphere, is consciously shared with the audience, addressed as feminist.

These carefully orchestrated looks and addresses to the camera reach outside of the diegetic action to create a moment of complicity with the audience. In a sense, the absurd constraints on bourgeois femininity so precisely recreated in the film's visual language prompt a leap to a different level of discourse for commentary. (179)

For Pidduck, Orlando's looks form the film's feminist structure of address, whereby Orlando becomes a 'time-travelling feminist observer – and ultimately a protagonist journeying towards herself, towards artistic creation' (183-84). Through her looks and addresses to the camera, Swinton's Orlando usurps and comments upon the constraints of narrative and social codes. Leaping to that 'different level of discourse for commentary', Pidduck finds that the character's agency inheres not in its capacity for action and narrative control – a position she ascribes to traditionally masculine film characterisation – but in its extradiegetic feminist retelling of English imperialist history (181-85). This reading parallels in form, though not content, my argument that Orlando's subjective agency drives what is to be considered significant in the text's

narrative, and invokes its readers through a shared desire that is politicised, through a shared politics that is eroticised.

CONCLUSION

The structures of address through which new forms of narrative and subjectivity find expression, invoke in their alliance of pleasure and address the "pleasure in understanding" that underwrites the projects of Reception Theory. Yet "address", and "audience" especially, can be located within a range of forms from linguistic to literal. Analyses of the "real" reader have been increasingly popular across the twentieth century. Holub refers to "dozens" of studies appearing in the west from the 1970s to the mid-1980s (the moment of his book) to "remedy" the abstractions of the "implied reader" or their "horizons of expectations" (1984: 135). The limitation of this shift from hermeneutics toward statistical and survey methods is its focus on yet another object (no longer the text but the reader), rather than attending to the problem of focussing on objects *per se*. To take account of intersubjectivity requires a quantum jump in the mode, not the object, of analysis. Though it is difficult to achieve, or conceive in terms of cultural critique, the process of intersubjectivity enabled through textual reception requires not an empirical focus – on "others" and how they make meaning – but focus on the subject, the critic, performing the analysis. It requires us to inquire into our own practices.

To articulate aesthetic experience, one's pleasure in the text, requires the location of those modes of subjectivity that do not lend themselves easily to current forms of criticism. This is why Jauss's revisions have been left barely addressed. The task appears to call for a conscious subjective state of awareness, rather than a preordained set of tools to analyse the external object (text, audience). Subjective agency, in this sense, is a force that can be applied, withdrawn, reoriented, by the subject. The subject may well be partially socially embodied and culturally embedded. But the subject is also always in a state of potentiality: to enact or refuse the concretisation of the text, the internalisation of social imperatives. The emancipatory understanding of subjectivity is clearly in its return to the agential rather than determined aspect of the subject – the subject as subject, not object of analysis. The obvious limitation for this position as critique is its relative inarticulability. Yet for this notion of experience, the force of will ensures its emancipatory state. In intersubjective terms, subjective will is always a matter of present-moment agency. The greatest problem posed to critical theories of the subject, by the interrelated concepts of subject, experience and will, is precisely its radical emancipatory potential. The circulations of meaning are never restricted to

textual (written, language) codes: the subjective response inheres in the way that ideas and concepts – such as gender dimorphism – are introjected and embodied. Bodies respond to texts, ideas and other bodies through fashions chosen, poses struck, desires articulated and/or enacted. Subjects respond to subjectivity through medical, legal, philosophical and multiple other discourses and practices. In a plain sense there can be no subject-object transmission, for even in the most absolute of contexts there is always the potential for resistance. In the circulation of meanings, no subject is wholly determined nor wholly volitionally free. Subjective agency is partial, impermanent, and subject to negotiation.

CONCLUSION: MAKING WAVES

Yes, she thought ... I can begin to live again ... the little boat is climbing through the white arch of a thousand deaths. I am about to understand ...

(Woolf, 1928: 307)

If I had to summarise in one word the argument put forth through this thesis I would choose the word "motion". Galileo famously sent the Pope and the Inquisition into a tailspin when his new astronomy refuted the cosmology of the crystal spheres – in which "mankind" on 'earth' was at the centre of a universe overseen by God – and offered a new narrative in which the earth was a bit player in the solar system, spinning around the sun within a universe in motion. Five centuries later I run less risk in proclaiming motion as the key force of my narrative of the subject. Yet all this time later the challenge to reconfigure our sense of subjectivity into motion remains relevant. Though the subject has been decentred in twentieth-century intellectual projects, strategies of reading still maintain it in stasis. We have become accustomed to working with supposition: of certainty and this inflects our construal of subjectivity. Contemporary paradigms of thought have compelled our confrontation with uncertainty. I wanted to explore the possibilities for subjectivity when uncertainty, the apex of contemporary scientific theory, is taken up as an art.

This thesis has been about the subject and about Woolf's aesthetics in *Orlando* as an art of intersubjectivity. I began by asking: what other subjective differences are possible when the subject does not begin from identification? If material inequalities are in part executed through the introjection of gender under threat, then what happens to gender, and to politics, when that "choice" to introject is not made, or is made incompletely, or is abandoned? The critical tasks for this thesis were to analyse how subjectivity is

conventionally grounded in and represented through the mutually constitutive identity categories of gender and sex/uality; to argue that such representations remain structured by the hierarchy of subject-object relations; to address how the subject's intelligibility is as much a function of reception as of self-avowal, and to offer a model of intersubjectivity – drawing from the intersecting intellectual projects of Woolf, quantum physics and reception theorists – through which the subject is understood as a process of choice and experiential agency, expressed as freedom.

Reading Production through Intersubjectivity

I have challenged the foundations of identity politics through a call for a new mode of reading production that is instrumental in the shift of perspective from subject-object to intersubjective relations. To initiate this move I worked closely within debates around gender and subjectivity. In the *Men in Feminism* debates I discerned unarticulated confusion around the role of experience in gendered subjectivity. Arguments about men's engagement in feminism were organised around literal and figurative deployments of gender, and the motif of the cross-dresser came to represent the public "initiation" of men into feminist discursivity. I placed the image of the cross-dresser under pressure, through different discursive domains, to elicit the gendered and sexed assumptions behind its heightened significance.

It was instrumental for my argument to reconstitute "experience" for a newer model of the subject as and in process. Working through Fuss's arguments around essentialism I argued that "experience" lapsed into empiricism only when deployed as a guarantee of authority. I reconceptualized "experience" as indexing a state of subjectivity that is agential, in motion and as such, empty; moving "experience" from the stasis of place – of speaking positions – to the indeterminacy of space. Here "experience" is the awareness or consciousness of the subject's transience; its arising and dissolution in momentary encounters with the material and energetic domains. It is far removed from the "experience" which, in Fuss's argument, is underwritten by a metaphysics of presence. Where the place of subjectivity was marked out by a materialist politics of identity, the ungrounded space of subjectivity is navigated through "experience". Thus the subject is set in motion, interfluxing with material and energetic vortexes. It is not the measurable movement within newtonian cosmology but the momentum of a quantum physical world.

A second domain of counter-cultural gender practices, the transgenderist, focussed questions of "experience" and subversion onto the reception effects of *The Crying Game* and *Paris is Burning*. My reading of both films was contrary to their general reception as progressive in terms of gender and sexuality. Taking intelligibility as my criterion for radical subjectivity I located each film within the contexts of their reception. I used the oedipal narrative, with irony, as an analytical key to *The Crying Game*. The film's overdrawn metaphors of genital significance and castration invited such an approach and reinforced the mutual over-determinations of psychoanalysis and the system it exists to explain. I considered the legal interference with the Ball Queens' subjectivities and extended the analysis into legal interpretations of transgenderists in court. If subjective practices are held to challenge the sex/gender system beyond the domain of the cultural, they must negotiate successfully the broader public sphere and its interface with the private sphere. Yet the failure of such subjectivities to achieve intelligibility within the court room was a direct effect of legal reading practices: the defining structure of judicial discourse in the constitution of the subject remains the static *place of standing*.

The key question at this juncture was: how might reading practices disarticulate subjectivity and place? The reconception of "experience" formed part of the response. Yet, I argued, the subject-object impulse governs reading practices within the sex/gender system and restricts to oppositionality the freeplay often acclaimed as transgressive. I sought to analyse the subject-object model through a third counter-cultural practice, sadomasochism. Though cross-dressing and transgenderism work at the gender pole of sex/gender, and s/m is more expressly a practice foremost of sexuality, each of these domains functions within sex/gender critiques as a site for the production of radical identifications. It was at the level of its significance for identity that I explored discourses of s/m. In particular I addressed the subject-object relation invoked in the theatrically oppositional and engendered roles within s/m play. I began with the "safe word" in s/m, working from its internal limits to define the reach of its radicalism.

I read s/m concurrently through testimonial discourses and through reference to constructions of Sade as exemplar of the masculine quest for selfhood through identification with power and loss. I considered the significance for twentieth-century subjectivity that Sade came to represent the truth of sex; that the relationship between desire and the subject was marked by sexual violence. Both Sade and Sacher-Masoch

were aristocrats living at the edge of massive social upheaval. If, following Deleuze and Guattari, libidinal energy can generate revolution, then the emergence of s/m at such heightened historical moments can be understood to represent ambivalence in the face of impending social change. The collective fantasies produced in their eroticisation of dominance and submission represent a desire for liberation from, and fear of loss of, the symbolism of absolute authority. S/m in this way represents a particular response to the problem of the Absolute for the ritual of subjective self-determination. It takes the concept of the Absolute as the unbounded realm of desire and the projection of the irreducibility of gender. In its repetition of the link between physical violence and sexuality, I argued that s/m is more an avowal of patriarchal power relations than a transgression of them, and an active support for culturally dominant delusions of gender.

Through the critique of identity politics in Section 1, and in Section 2 the work with Jauss on reception theory, and the uncertainty and momentum characterised by quantum thought, I created the foundations for a shift from subject-object to intersubjective relations mediated through the functions of reading and experience.

Twenty-First Century Woolf

Using the apparatus of intersubjectivity I advanced a reading of Woolf that reinvigorates her thought in newer debates. Uncertainty as the organising principle of the text directed my analysis of the text's subjective aesthetics. I argued that the non-representational biography was less about Orlando as a subject than about the processes of subjective formation through which Orlando acquires subjective agency. I focussed on the critique of conventions of representation, and of being, at the various compositional levels in the text.

I analysed how Woolf's play with conventions works through sustained layering to disarticulate the mind of Orlando from the conventions that would define Orlando, and showed how Woolf's deployment of subjective agency in *Orlando* can be understood as an action of mind. Orlando's subjectivity lies not in the aggregate of reading conventions that render "her" intelligible through the lens of pronouns, gender, sex/uality, class, ethnicity. Orlando's subjectivity is instead, as the final chapter of the novel dramatises, a process of mind interacting with its contexts and unavailable as an object for analysis according to the convention of the biographer and "his" readership.

In this gift to her lover, Woolf construed writing as 'a secret transaction, a voice answering a voice', a 'stammering answer', 'secret...slow...like the intercourse of lovers'. Here she prefigures Jaus in drawing an intersubjective aesthetic defined by "pleasure in understanding". Orlando's agency consists in that which lies beyond the conventional self, in qualities of consciousness beyond the conditioned; in ecstasy. Orlando's moment-to-moment experience of consciousness comes to designate Woolf's subjective aesthetic. Experience, indexed as a present conscious agency, is the mode of representation for her desiring subject. Necessarily intersubjective, the desiring is both Woolf's and Sackville-West's, convergent in the subject of Orlando, and offered as a model for the relationship between *Orlando* and its receptions. Through the text's artifice, space is created for the subject's self-determination. The text is a literary argument for subjective self-determination, against the conventions that determine the subject through the imperative for linearity. In a state of present-moment consciousness, Orlando confronts 'a shadow without substance or quality of its own, yet [which] has the power to change whatever it adds itself to'. Here Orlando comes closest to defining her own subjective agency: without substance or quality, yet having the power to change the objects of its focus. In place of a discrete, intelligible self for consumption by others, Woolf offers in *Orlando* the pleasure of experiencing intersubjective relations through the powerful lens of present-moment consciousness. Far from an evasion of the "realities" of socially, materially constructed selves, I found in Woolf a radical and nuanced model of intersubjectivity. Such a reading was not available without delineating the conceptual shift from subject-object relations to intersubjectivity.

Interdisciplinary Dialogue

Taking reading practices as my mode and object of analysis I have advanced an interdisciplinary dialogue, making connections and allowing insights that exceed the boundaries of any of the specific disciplines addressed. In order to make my case against identity politics in Section 1 I consulted legal, medical, sexological, psychoanalytic, linguistic, sub-cultural testimonial and film texts. To shape my model of intersubjectivity in Section 2 I worked with reception theories, quantum physics, early twentieth-century reviews, feminist and queer theories, and of course, Woolf's *Orlando*. This breadth of material illustrates the reach and circularity of the practices of reading which constitute a technology of the subject. It was essential to consult across disciplinary domains for analysis of the subject at its entangled roots.

Current zones of inquiry into the sexed and gendered subject have reached an impasse, as they founder on strategies of identification that recycle problems of essentialism and abstraction. I have asked key questions about certain feminist structures and reading practices to elicit unarticulated assumptions and to challenge limits. I have had to seek out new ways to approach the subject, taking inspiration from the emancipatory impulses in critiques of the sex/gender system (from feminist, post-feminist, queer and cultural studies) and yet striking out on my own over the terrain of gender acquisition. I have had to break this new ground by applying the critical insights of theories that might otherwise have no obvious basis for dialogue with debates around the sex/gender system.

Working closely with theories of the subject in reception theory, and with the implicit intersubjectivity of quantum physics, I have shaped a working concept of intersubjectivity that serves a dual function for my argument. I offer a model of intersubjectivity for dislodging the subject-object model that, I have argued, forms the superstructure of the sex/gender system. The subject I work with is in motion, experiential (in new ways), intangible. Further, I deploy intersubjectivity as an apparatus for reading Woolf's aesthetic of the subject in *Orlando*. Central questions in Woolf have not been answered by traditional feminist approaches, nor fully by theorists of sexuality. I have directed my attention to what has been absent in feminist discursivity around Woolf. My model of intersubjectivity obviates the methodology of identity politics for making sense of this most radical of Woolf's texts. I offer it as a serious challenge to the persistent reliance on subject-object relations in the discourses around sex/gender theory, and subjectivity in a broader sense. In its emphasis on reception and indeterminacy, an intersubjective reading of Woolf has enabled a close and attentive reading that expands our understanding of Woolf's characterisation in *Orlando*. The text does much more than critique conventions of gender and all that flow from them. It does more than offer the first lesbian-positive moment in literary history. Through the model of intersubjectivity I have shown how *Orlando* dramatises the shift from subject-object to intersubjective relations, in a manner wholly pleasurable that offers a way forward from the limitations of the materialist critique of the sex/gender system.

Intersubjectivity does not accommodate the more conventional identity descriptors (queer, woman) with their immediate applications within policy and political debate. Intersubjectivity is a long-range instrument for analysis of subjectivity. In its capacity

for incorporating experiential agency into cultural production and reception, intersubjectivity allows for the multiple dimensions of subjective interaction. It represents an advance from the two-dimensional hierarchisation of subject-object relations to a more complex and serviceable order for understanding the processes of subjectivity in textual production, consumption and analysis. My work with intersubjectivity calls for a radically different response to the subject within sex/gender debates. Unrestricted by the realpolitik pragmatics of identity politics, it calls for the serious reconsideration of intellectual creativity in the realm of subjectivity. Much as Deleuze argued for the importance of building the new functions and discovering the new fields that make current formations of the subject useless or inadequate (Nancy *et al*, eds, 1991: 94), I have argued in this thesis for newer and more satisfying forms for reading the subject. I have proposed intersubjectivity as a new model for analysis and drawn on Woolf's *Orlando* as its exemplary form. Under the pressure of the current age of global corporatism and pragmatist politics I have found it essential to rethink the subject intersubjectively; to look beyond the pragmatics of subjectivity for what I wish to call now the art of intersubjectivity. The conceptual shift enacted through the thesis is from a model of consumption, with its implications of passivity and unilaterality, to a model of creation, of subjective agency through the interactions of address. Intersubjective processes enable the intelligibility of difference through which the subject acquires freedom.

Subjects in motion interconnecting through "pleasure in understanding", and the ecstasy of intersubjectivity – in plain terms these denote a perspective of empathy. In these times that favour materialist intellectual work, empathy has application after all. As we negotiate a "new world order", prompted by only the most recent of endless cycles of people killing and being killed for what they *represent*, we must consider whether we can afford to persist in peddling the delusions of identification, ignoring the experiences of our subjectivity as indeterminate. If the minutiae of the subatomic world and its implications for subjectivity have hitherto been overlooked for political and practical consideration, then the madness and misdeeds of identifications within subject-object relations might hasten and harness our drive toward intersubjectivity. I have argued for and illustrated a model for this move. Whereas the structure of subject-object relations encodes compulsion, intersubjectivity is entirely a matter of will. Therein lie both its uncertainty, and its guarantee of subjective freedom.

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