

What Gender Is, What Gender Does

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Introduction

Genders are neither binary nor essential. Nor are they singular, unchanging, invariable, inherent, or flatly definitive. Genders are not names, labels, or identities; they are neither nouns nor adjectives. Gender is a verb, a process. Genderings constantly change. Individuals are always more than one gender. These multiple genderings are culturally intelligible.

To gender is to signal, mask, obscure, suggest, mislead, misrecognize, and simplify the uncontrollable, uncategoryzable chaos of desires and incommensurabilities characteristic of subjects, but energetically contained by society. Gender's job is always to make the subject fit.

Insofar as one of two binary gender distinctions tends to stand in for and obscure the complex negotiations genders represent, "to gender" is always to reduce, locate, and simplify processes that extend through history from the psychological terrain of the subject to the sociocultural manifestations, ramifications, imperatives, and possibilities attached to genders' binary resolutions.

Most of the examples of genders in this book come from popular cultural texts, a changing terrain if ever there was one. Popular culture texts most unwittingly provide examples of gendering trends and styles. The benefit of these examples is that most people will recognize them. The detriment is that such examples become out-of-date rapidly. Hence this book will seem always to be behind the times, but then genders, too, are always changing.

How to Use This Book

Genders are dynamics, persistent sets of operations that link individual desires to multiple, shifting manifestations of sociocultural

positioning and self-presentation. These manifestations include narratives of cultural and familial roles, sexual desires (both of the subject and of those for whom the subject is a potential object), economic and political interpellations (i.e., questionnaires), commodified styles, peer mimicry, imaginaries of identity and the body, and occasional performances. Genders' operations are both conscious and unconscious. They are simultaneously conventional and idiosyncratic. More than one gender dynamic operates at a time in any individual, and these dynamics constantly morph depending on broad context; sociocultural environments such as race, class, religion, education, ethnic tradition, and relative wealth; other cooperating dynamics (social and peer groups, family and local tradition, available popular cultural models); age; idiosyncratic circumstances; and an individual's own history and psychological structures, desires, and responses. Gender is multiple, chatoyant, messy, and very, very provisional, yet at the same time, seemingly binary.

Because gender is unfixable, much cultural energy goes into trying to "fix" it. Even apparently countercultural discourses such as "queer" are concepts that find a place for this unfixable gender to stay fixed in the binary normative/queer, even if as an "unfixed" portion of the equation. But if gender, as it operates in and through the subject and culture, is not reducible to any standard, structurally useful binary—male/female, feminine/masculine, normative/queer—what then? What happens to the systems—family, capitalism, reproduction, religion, economics—that genders subtend (and which in turn binarize genders) if we rethink genders as something other than the stylistic and/or identitarian correlative to biological sex? Although, as always, one cannot simply recast a part to change a larger set of apparently inert formations (such as sexual difference or heteronormativity), what if this nonbinary gender multiplicity has been functioning as an intrinsic element in sex/gender organizations all along? If we understand genders as multiple and changing instead of complementary, as a process instead of an ontology, as a flux instead of a stable identification or interpellation, then this binarizing impetus is only one mode of gendering, among others. One function of gendering is to process the messy back into structure's dualistic protocols. How might thinking of gendering

as effecting multiple, morphing, and chatoyant presentations alter the ways we think about gender categories, desires, sexualities, and subjectivity? Could admitting what we already know—that there are more than two genders and that these genders are culturally intelligible and operant—change conceptions of the structural "truths"—reproduction, sex, "God's plan"—that gender binaries appear to front? What social and psychological gains might there be should this shift come about?

Genders' apparent binary consistency is the effect of a defensive, taxonomic gender process (one among many) that perpetually re-sorts (and reinterprets) all complex gender operations, manifestations, and presentations back into comprehensible dual alignments of bodies, cultural structures—such as the imaginary of reproduction—and conventional gender displays.¹ This taxonomic dynamic (or "regime") operates both culturally and intrapsychically. Binary gender appears as natural, preexistent, and necessary—as a cultural given that enables the orderly playing out of various meta-narratives (e.g., reproduction, family, capitalism) that both depend on and produce gender as a set of complementary opposites. Although this taxonomic impetus perpetually reasserts gender binaries, it is no more central or dispositive than other regimes of intelligible, cooperative genderings. Despite the apparent comforts of binary organizations, we also constantly recognize and interpret a plethora of other modes of gendering as well as understand the complex subjectivities, desires, and positions they present. Why do we know what "gym teacher" means? How do we understand the beauty queen or the "mean girl"? Who was Paul Lynde or James Bond? How do we understand Jane Lynch, Lady Gaga, or Hillary Clinton? Or the genders of Sheldon Cooper, Howard Wolowitz, and Raj Koothrappali on *The Big Bang Theory*? Or Tyler Perry's self-transformational capacities?

As the continuously revising effect of complex cultural and psychological operations, gendering is a constantly evolving amalgamation of systems, regimes, and structures loaded with shifting dynamics, registers, vectors, and variables. Just as genders do not comply with genomes or hormones, so they are not merely the products of kinship taboos, reproductive scenarios, or religious strictures. These

later formations, understood structurally, supply a part of the symbolic material in relation to which individuals might understand gender possibilities, but they do not define or delimit the genders that ensue.² Instead, these symbolic categories are necessary because genders are rarely compliant; the insistence of ideological formations is an effect of the degree to which subjects do not easily align with, submit to, or emerge from the simplified, binary, regulatory roles of such imperative systems. Genders afford the broad terrain through which an individual's interpretations, both conscious and unconscious, of the relation between mind and body, self and other, and subject and socius manifest as provisional positionings and protocols of desire. Genders enable and signal individual desires, affinities, and sociocultural locations.

As complex dynamics that negotiate the subject's relations to itself and to the larger culture, genders operate through and are generated in relation to all available sociocultural matrices. Genderings manifest through images, narratives, categories, divisions, acts, styles, fantasies, imperatives, and symbolic structures. They are simultaneously unconscious and conscious; subjects perpetually generate them anew from intra-psychic material and imitate cultural possibilities. While on the one hand, genders constitute the very terms through which representation—and especially narrative as an epistemology of meaning—might seem to function, on the other hand, they appear to subvert sociocultural intelligibility while distracting from the impossibility of compliance. Genderings hide the fact that they never organize what they seem to organize—that the reproductive binary that genders front is as much a fiction as the binary types necessary to the tidy dualisms of the sex/gender narrative. In seeming to do what they do, genders never do what we think they are doing. Insofar as genders express a subject's positionings and desires within the range of possible expressions, they also never succeed in this expression. Insofar as genders' appearances signal everything from a subject's sociocultural position to its biological reality, genders are always mis-taken, operating on the objective plane of the fantasies of others.³ Although subjects express through appearance and behaviors, their demeanors are never what they think they are. In short, genders are not only noncompliant

and disparate; they are also approximations, open to perpetual adjustment. This approximate quality makes it difficult to define genders, as we never think we are defining what we think we are defining. Genders and subjects slip out. In the end we guess, we categorize; hence the comforts of a clean binary certainty that seems to line up everything.

Nor do genders constitute a closed system that would enable some outside perspective, some capability of enlisting genders' possibilities and operations.⁴ No one can stand outside of gender and describe it, since there is no outside and there is no one (given that our very concept of the subject as always already gendered) who could occupy a vantage that is not already a part of genders' systems. Even if subjects define themselves as Tiresian, as the subject who "has looked at life from both sides now," this perspective is only one regime among genders' many. Although this Tiresian regime seems to stand outside, observing genders' various manifestations—its categorical masquerades, its performance of the provisional securities of identity fictions, the delusively clear terrain of genders' oppositions that sustains so many of our sense-making projects (narrative, epistemology, subjectivity), this chimeric perspective is a gender regime like all the others and, hence, is not outside genders' systems at all.

Genders beyond Structuralism

But how to lay out the complexities of genders without inadvertently returning to a binary habit? How to describe the various regimes by which genders organize themselves without making these appear as an extended taxonomy of equally definitive typologies or categories? And how to do this without making the possibilities seem more definitive—more leading, more expressive, more a matter of choice—than they are? Perhaps models of dynamic processes will serve better than the structuralisms of narrative, anthropology, performance, psychological formulations—such as melancholia or narcissism, or even the processual ossifications of popularized science (genes, for example), all of which thinkers have deployed in one way or another to account for and describe

the acquisition of gender.⁵ Rethinking genders requires at least two endeavors: (1) reconsidering gender as a process, what genders do, and how they do it; and (2) rethinking the concepts and assumptions by which we understand the intersections of the social, the psychological, cultural imaginaries, and subjectivities. This is necessary insofar as we understand binary gender itself as a structure intrinsic to most structuralist understandings of meaning and subjectivity. If we are to see genders outside of their autopoiesis (i.e., outside of their persistent binary homeostasis via narrative and structuralism in general), we need to deploy modes of thinking that are no longer binary and structuralist, and that allow for the coexistence of multiple, inter-inflective dynamics. This invites the appropriation of concepts from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, principles from systems theory, and insights from Jacques Lacan's formulations of the subject, its sexuation, and the systemic character of the links between individual psychological systems, available symbolic materials, and the social. These approaches share an attention to post-structural complexity and an understanding of phenomena as multiple, inseparable, inter-inflective, and difficult to delineate.

Just as genders are complex and without beginning or end, the following chapters might be read in any order, especially to avoid the tendency to return genders' multiple regimes to a binary taxonomy, sets of accruing categories, or a series of descriptors like ice cream flavors. Keeping the following set of precepts in mind will help keep genders' dynamic, systemic, complex, and changing character in play:

1. The chapters in this book can be read in any order, after this first one.
2. The book is organized according to some of the grounding dynamics or "regimes" of gender, which, though defined and discussed separately, are entangled, inter-constitutive, nonexclusive, and multiply inflective—that is, rarely isolated or crystal clear, and changing their manifestations as one reads. Although various gender regimes have provisional thematic names, remember that regimes are dynamics, slants, and/or filters organized

- around actions, vectors, attitudes (in the aeronautical sense), and motifs, and thus do not constitute the categories of anything like a finished "product" or status.
3. No subject participates in only one gender regime.
4. An individual's genderings change through time. Gender regimes change through time.
5. An individual's genderings change from context to context. Gender regimes morph from context to context.
6. The intersections of gender regimes produce infinite gender variation. Gender variation produces infinite manifestations of any given regime.
7. Individuals accede to genderings in multiple and often contradictory unconscious and conscious ways, including unconscious intra-psychic processes such as sexuation, social pressures, (apparently) conscious choice, unwitting (and hence paradoxical) performative gestures, strategic deployments, irony, and resistance. How individuals participate in this gender system is a part of the organizing dynamics themselves. The primary dynamic of any regime defines its enregisterment—the perceptual order around which the regime organizes (i.e., the scopic is visual, metamorphosis is temporal, etc.).
8. No one ever completely fits a gender regime; no gender regime ever completely fits a binary taxonomy. There is always a remainder. There is always a mis-take.
9. Any notion of regime will always be slightly out of date, as regimes change constantly. We only apprehend a regime as such once it has shifted to something else.

What Gender Is

When we talk about "gender," we seem to know what we are talking about. No one questions what gender itself might be. The word "gender" derives from the Latin root, *genus*, meaning "kind." *Genus* is also the root of the verb "engender," referring to reproduction. Gender is, thus, both effect and process, the hallmark of autopoiesis, or the self-reproduction of systems.⁶ In Western cultures, "gender"

seems to have a standard meaning, referring to whether someone is a girl or a boy, a man or a woman. Or is that feminine or masculine? Or female or male? We use the term "gender" to refer to these various categorical distinctions without making much of a distinction, but each of the three groupings refers to a different phenomenon with significant social, material, and psychological stakes and effects. "Girl, boy, woman, man" constitute social categories produced as the oppositions that moor systems ranging from kinship to commodity culture, reproduction, and law. These terms are naturalized as imaginary correlatives of the biological categories of "male and female" sex, which are defined as such on the basis of a particular reproductive scenario involving two kinds of synecdochizing gametes (discovered much later in the history of concepts about reproduction), which themselves are usually, but not always, produced by two slightly different versions of the same organism. We imagine that this reproductive scenario subtends social formations that reflect it, such as the patriarchal nuclear family. Masculine and feminine represent the two categories of a binary, taxonomic gender, which may or may not align with "male" and "female." Of all of the terms above, only these two refer to gender; the rest refer to sex. The term "sexual difference" refers to a binary sexual distinction between bodies that underwrites the sets of sexual genderings that seem to follow. Slippages between sex and gender enable the cultural imperative that binary genders reflect ineluctable biological conditions; such confusions also subtend such formations as transgender and transsexuality.⁷

We treat biological sex as more materially based than the sociocultural categories of gender, and, thus, it seems to offer definitive somatic correlatives to social categories, from which we then imagine the social categories arise. We assume a causal line from a genotype (XX or XY), to bodies' hormonal and physiological reflection of that genotype, to sets of culturally defined predilections and stereotypes (the ever-present insistence on pink and blue), to reproductive roles, physical and emotional capabilities, rules of deportment, intelligence, and social support systems. We go from the molecular to the cultural as if seamlessly, male/female subtending masculine/feminine.

Different cultures have differing understandings of the relation between sex and gender. The United States, for example, tends to see the relation between biological sex and gender as causal and naturalized, while in some parts of western Europe the sex/gender link may be more displaced from biology. In almost every culture there are exceptions that prove the rule. Any alignment of these binaries—any appeal to "nature" or "God's plan"—requires that we ignore the spectrum of less oppositional biological possibilities such as hermaphroditism and intersex, opportunistic sex (one changes sex depending on the environment), or no sex at all linked to a wide variety of reproductive mechanisms (from cell fission to the development of unfertilized eggs). Only by ignoring biology's alternatives to binary sexual difference can we use biology as a foundation for other conceptions of binary gender.⁸ Although, as far as we know, humans reproduce only via sexual reproduction, the nuclear family, imagined as support and correlative for this process (as well as rationalized by it), takes many forms that do not reflect any strictly heteronormative reproductive structure—extended families, matriarchal families, adoptive families, gay and lesbian families, single parents, et cetera.

As "femininity and masculinity," binary gender also refers to culturally available interpretations of individual positionings in relation to desire and sexual difference, both through various social interpellations and "sexuation," an intra-psychical process outlined by Jacques Lacan, through which individuals link mind and body in relation to sexual difference as both a social structure and the scaffold for possible desires.⁹ Sexuation's interpretations provide some of the feeling of coherence among the fictions of individual identity, social roles, bodies, and desires. These fictions are organized by and apparently unified, redundant institutional formations aligned with one another around a single axis of oppositional (read sexual) difference (male/female, masculine/feminine, capital/labor). Even though the broad taxonomies of masculinity and femininity exist as a range of expressions displayed through an elaborate lexicon of styles and behaviors, the binary character of this gender epistemology defines and delimits the terrain of individual sexual desires. Culturally, the narratives of desire encoded through binary

interpretations of sex/gender push toward the union of fantasmatically complementary opposites premised on an imaginary of reproductive function.

Individuals, however, interpret their own relation to desires and fantasies in multiple and conflicting ways, so that even if cultures tend to be rigidly heteronormative, a wide range of sexual desires and identities still operate. The alignment of binary concepts of sex/gender with sociocultural meta-narratives provisionally reconstitutes this range of desires. An obvious example of this recontainment occurs when same-sex desires are defined as sexual "inversions," or when same-sex partners interpret their own roles within a relationship as male/female or masculine/feminine.¹⁰ "Which one is the boy?" Individuals may indeed consciously interpret their positions, relations, and identities via the cultural effects of binary genderings. But even if binary positionings represent the psychical interpretations of individuals, these interpretations result from and are enabled by what is available at any given time within cultures as parts of symbolic and imaginary formations. Hence turn-of-the-century lesbians might have perceived themselves as inverts, while '70s lesbians rejected all aspects of patriarchy. The point is that such interpretations derive precisely from binary organizations of sexual difference, whether they pervert, reinterpret, appropriate, liberate, or travesty them.

Cultural meta-narratives—reproduction, capitalist production, and the structure of narrative itself—transform complex and multifarious phenomena into generic categories whose interrelation makes sense only within a model of opposition/joiner/product.¹¹ Gender is already inflected by a logic that assumes the complementary contribution of "opposites" premised on the interaction of binary "kinds" glossed reproductively. Understanding (re)production as the combining of opposites to a productive end characterizes the broad strokes of capitalism (labor and capital = product), reproduction (male and female = child), and story (protagonist and antagonist = result). Insofar as a specifically binary notion of gender is necessary to enable these meta-narratives, so these meta-narratives produce gender as binary—but only because genders always threaten to escape, exceed, and evade this structural capture.

What Gender Does

Because we assume that human reproduction—and, echoing its imaginary model, romance—requires two sexes, we must understand gender, too, within the same apparently complementary, binary matrix. It is difficult to tell, however, which comes first. Do we understand reproduction the way we do because sexual difference works as a complementary binary, do we gloss reproduction through the gender imperatives of other cultural formations, or are both of these the products of a binary mode of thinking? Just as products differ from the processes of their production, so gender as processual is not the same as reproductive engendering. By confusing and conflating the registers of the biological, sociocultural, and psychical, what we think of as gender stands in place of the transposition of these registers. Gender is the seemingly stable category that masks the impossible process of aligning individual bodies with sociocultural norms. It is also the systemic effect of that misalignment. The gender system works constantly to negotiate and balance the intersections of different orders (body, society, subjectivity), making them appear aligned, commensurate, natural, and productive, helping to produce oppositions out of confusing multiplicities, and organizing disparate bodies to sustain the imaginary binaries of social and cultural organization.

Although we may want to distinguish scrupulously among the biological, the social, and the cultural, the phenomena we refer to as "gender" belong as much to the confusions, intricacies, imaginary lines of causation, and even similarities among these registers as they do to binary, sociocultural notions of masculinity and femininity. The confusions among categories circulate through and help constitute the prerogatives, practices, and styles of masculinity and femininity both as possible interpretations of subjective positioning and, as themselves, the end product of a much more varied, yet intelligible range of kinds. In this way, gender works to suture the social and symbolic processes of culture to the psychical processes of the individual. Gender, then, is one set of processes by which individuals locate themselves both consciously and unconsciously in relation to a plethora of social systems whose reliance on fictions

of complementarity require a certain side-taking. The social system, for example, offers ready-made interpretations of sexual difference—pink, blue—that precede (but which do not define) an infant's encounter with its own difference (from others, from itself). The sets of analogies forged among the various binaries that enable, for example, a woman to become a feminine wife, are not in fact rigid or definitive. Rather, the whole dilemma of gender is that these binaries, though pervasive and apparently controlling, only tenuously organize a polymorphousness that always threatens to escape as chaos.

As genders' homeostasis, binarism appears to ground genders' interpretation of sexual difference; but this binarism also provides the state of asymmetrical imbalance toward which gender systems incline insofar as cultures tend to value one gender (read *sex*) more highly than the other. The interpretation of difference, whether such process is subjective or cultural, is never symmetrical and never arrives at equality or equanimity. Difference's inherent asymmetricality is counterrintuitive insofar as dialectical ideologies (*yin/yang*, for example) seem to perform the complementarity and interdependence that would signal an equilibrium. The problem is that difference is not dialectical. It does not belong to a realm of balance, but, rather, it destroys balance in its advent as a difference that preserves the same. For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "oppositional difference is the same, it is the form of the same: it is the most abstract form of expression of society's homogenizing tendencies"¹² For Jacques Lacan, the advent of difference forces the production of a subjective dynamic in relation to a world that was at one point a universe of sameness that is no longer the same.¹³ The advent of difference precipitates sexuation, the psychical processes that constitute the mind and link it to the body.

As an articulation of, or perhaps more accurately, a displacement of, difference, gender offers the register through which intrapsychic processes link to social and cultural possibilities. Although parts of a larger system that inflects them, subjects encounter difference as a condition of their being, and depending on whether one is Deleuze and Guattari or Lacan, that difference makes a difference. For Deleuze and Guattari, gender difference is "done unto it by the

socius." "Gendering is the process by which a body is socially determined to be determined by biology: social channelization cast as destiny by being pinned to anatomical difference."¹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari would prefer hypersingularly—that every subject is indeed uniquely different—over binary gender classifications. They laud the "heteroclitic" instead of the gendered, envisioning a culture of "hyperdifferentiation" in which no pre-set value can delimit becoming. In a sense, this hyperdifferentiation already exists but is moderated precisely by the homeostasis of cultural systems (such as gender) that pressures the larger classification of individual differences and from which individuals adapt various modes of individual differentiation. The problem with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the heteroclitic is a problem of will and timing. At what point can individuals choose to be completely different from every other classification? Are individual subjects even in conscious control of this? Is there any possible way subjects can mess with the system without reiterating it?

Sexuation; or, The Psyche Meets the Social

Lacan would agree there is indeed hyperdifferentiation, insofar as each individual finds its own relation to difference. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, however, the range of possible dynamics is defined by a logic of sexuation, which involves a complex negotiation among orders that cannot be traded for either a wider or more indeterminate range of operations such as Deleuze and Guattari suggest. Individuals cannot escape their social symbolic contexts. As an incipient event in the individual's coming into being as a subject, there is, according to Lacan, a point at which something interrupts the subject's imaginary oneness with everything and the subject splits, becoming aware of its difference from the environment and from others. The holistic imaginary of pre-mirror-stage infants is disturbed at the moment the infant subject realizes its potential separateness. The "primordial identification of a child," then, as Lacan interprets Freud, "is to difference or Otherness whose referents are symbolic-order signifiers."¹⁵

In systems terms, the primordial psyche, which exists in a state

of oneness with its environment, suddenly encounters this environment as a difference that destroys its sense of being one with the world. This forces the psyche to incorporate its relation to the difference of the environment within its psychical system. The difference, introduced as the subject's relation to the environment, comes to define the psychic system itself, which interprets the psyche/environment relation in terms of signifiers representing difference. This difference is interpreted as sexual difference, which is itself defined by its inherent asymmetries. The key signifier of sexual difference's asymmetry is what Lacan calls the "Phallus," a signifier (rather than an organ) that stands in for having it all in cultures whose symbolic order locates wholeness on the side of what can be seen.¹⁶ As the visible manifestation and, hence, signifier of difference itself, the Phallus becomes the signifier of lack and impossible fulfillment that subtends identifications and desire. The ways that subjects position themselves in relation to this phallic signifier, which also links the operations of language to difference, also defines the direction of their desire.¹⁷ This increasingly complex knot of difference (difference from the environment, difference as grounding and inciting language, differences delineated around the phallic signifier) results in logics of desire and individual positioning that occur in relation to the incompleteness represented by the signifier, which perpetually substitutes for something else and at the same time marks a continual differentiation. And as Lacan reminds us, the "cut" made by the introduction of difference can never be repaired; subjects can only ever keep trying, keep desiring.

For Lacan, subjective identity, including gender "identity," is a way to resolve the effects of sexual difference and lack by identifying with what the subject imagines it has lost. Subjects try to patch lack by identifying with a range of possible objects. What these objects are and the position the subject takes in relation to the problem of difference (interpreted as the asymmetries of sexual difference) produces a range of sexualizations as solutions to the problem of difference. Lack, and the subject's position in relation to difference. Subjects locate themselves as male/all, female/not all, and (but not necessarily in a correlative way) as masculine/active and feminine/passive. As Ellie Ragland summarizes, "Masculine and feminine dis-

tinctions are determined not by 'psychic' essence or behavior, nor by any pre-given active or passive behavior(s) or attitude(s), including homosexual or heterosexual 'postures,' but as gender nonspecific identifications as lover (active) or beloved (passive)."¹⁸ "Lover" and "beloved" orient desires and modes of desiring that become drives. Structuring around desire defines the subject's inclination, instead of such inclinations deriving from any "natural" sexed predisposition. Thus, within Lacan's versions of a systemic subject, individual interpretations of sexual difference can result in a large number of positional permutations in relation to drives and the modes and objects of desire. These permutations are obscured by and interpreted through the asymmetries of binary gender, but they suggest a far more varied and distinctive set of individual differences.

Sexuation is, hence, a systemic aspect of the subject's psyche as it incorporates and processes its difference to the environment as a specific relation to available symbolic material in the environment. This symbolic material does not represent a question of value or object choice, but, rather, a question of whether to submit to the law of difference—difference represented by the Phallus as the literal projection of a difference as well as of the impossibility that any signifier is complete in itself. Submission to the fact of difference takes different forms, both in terms of sex (male/female) and of gender (masculinity/femininity), typified by the cultural association of activity with masculinity and passivity with femininity as positions or attitudes rather than essences. If cultural evaluations were different—say, the feminine was perceived as active—the psychological alignments around sexual difference might shift. There is no correlation between sex and gender in Lacan's thinking; rather, individuals develop differing relations to sexual difference itself. As Ragland formulates it, "The male identifies with a logic of accepting to be *all* under the law of the Ur-father, exception to the law, which also grounds it, while the female identifies a part of herself as *not being all* under the law of a conventional reality one might describe as patriarchal/phallic/symbolic 'law.'"¹⁹ And as we often see, even male and female may not correlate to biological status.

The processes of sexualization align even more. In addition to adopting positions in relation to all or not all, sexualization also locates

subjects along one of the four possible differential axes of the Lacanian clinic—the masquerade, the neuroses, the *père-version*, the psychoses—that map structures of mind according to the subject's interpretations of the sexual difference. Subjects might repress sexual difference in the masquerade, foreclose it in psychosis, repudiate it in perversion, and deny it in the neuroses.²⁰ Subjects' alignments are specific positions about their knowledge of difference: *repression* means knowing but not knowing one knows, *forclusion* means never having known, *repudiation* means knowing and ignoring, and *denial* means knowing and denying the knowledge.

None of this, however, yet adds up to a subject's genderings as these emerge from the subject's initial interpretation of sexual difference. The "lover" (active) and "beloved" (passive) first-stage "gender" identity is the effect of confusing gender with sexual difference "at the level," Ragland comments, "where primordial repression is not gendered, but is purely and simply, a relation to the objects of the world that cause desire."²¹ Lover and beloved represent different positions that subjects take up in relation to lack. These positions are also identificatory and epistemological insofar as they condition the ways subjects know.²² As identificatory positions irreducible to binary gender, the lover identifies with "a complete Other [the fantasmatist one who knows and has all]," while the beloved identifies "with an incomplete Other." As epistemological positions, lover and beloved represent subject positions in which the lover thinks "he or she knows it all," and the beloved "does not [know it] all."²³ These epistemological positions are neither biological sexes nor genders; instead, they enact a subject's relation to knowledge as a way of linking mind and body to difference. This difference is itself rendered as a question of an identification to a being who either knows everything or does not.

In addition to these identifications, Lacan defines other epistemological means of interpreting desire for both beloved and lover. These epistemological positions structure not only the subject's ways of knowing, but also the subject's modes of desire. The beloved interprets desire as either the *contingent* or the *impossible*, dynamics linked to knowing there is no all and to not identifying with the one who has all. The lover interprets desire as the *necessary* and the

possible related to knowing or believing in an all and that someone might have it all. The beloved's logic of the *impossible* correlates with the lover's logic of the *necessary*. While the *impossible* is "that which does not stop not being written," the *necessary* is "that which does not stop being written." The *contingent* is that which "stops not being written," while the *possible* is "that which ceases writing itself." The beloved is linked to what Ragland characterizes as the "not all based on the fear of castration, a fear that elicits closure."²⁴ At the least, the feminine logics allow for an undecidable: "The *impossible* pushes a subject to flee the unbearable, while the *contingent* lets in enough love to allow deadly repetitions to be rewritten." The lover is linked to death and castration, to an "illusion of the whole (or all) as the beginning and end of knowledge."²⁵

These logics of sexuation refer not only to epistemologies but also to unconscious modes of being—to ways of relating to desire and relating drives and desires to objects that produce and reflect the subject's idiosyncratic resolution to the problems of difference, desire, and love. Subjects' manifestations of sociocultural gender categories, even conscious adoptions or refusals to adopt a gendered position, are secondary to the unconscious negotiations of sexuation linking body and mind to the insistence of the drives that operate only because they are neither instinctive nor linked to any imagined reproductive imperative. Lacan's notion of the drive is, as Marie Hélène Brousse explains, "an apparatus by which to bring some sexuality as the real into the field of the Imaginary and the symbolic."²⁶ The drive is the impulsion or libido by which individuals link sexual feelings to particular acts and objects. The drive, which can never be satisfied, "is not organized by sexual polarity," Brousse explains, nor is there any "relation between the drive, drive satisfaction, and the opposition between male and female."²⁷ "The drive does not originate in a biological source," Brousse comments, but is a montage of differing sources, impeti, objects, and aims. "It is a montage precisely because it is not determined by a momentous force, an innate object, an aim in its finality, or consumption."²⁸ In fact, as Brousse continues, "there is no sexual or active/passive polarity which organizes the drive."²⁹ It is not determined by reproduction; it is certainly not instinctive.

Genders/Desires

A Lacanian interpretation aligns intra-psychical positionings with desires and interpretations of knowledge only loosely connected to possibilities defined not by a "truth" of sexual difference, but by an attitude unconsciously adopted in relation to two poles of belief: one can or cannot have all, and one can go after this all or not. These two beliefs do not transpose into binarized object choices, gendered dispositions, or even formulaic roles. Individuals interpret the effects, epistemologies, drives, and desires resulting from sexualization differently in relation to the codes offered culturally as a means by which to exist and desire. This means that what we take as gender is the result of a series of unconscious interpretations and has some relation, albeit illogical and fairly untraceable, to individual solutions to the problem of sexual difference and desire.

Genderings are, thus, the subjective illusion of positioning within multiple cultural orders that correspond with (1) the subject's interpretation of sexual difference (the four axes); (2) identifications with the position of lover or beloved, all or not all; (3) the character of lost objects (identifications, traces, names) the subject is driven to refund; and (4) what the subject understands the Other (the caretaker, the socius) wants the subject to be. While the first two of these elements reflect subjects' interpretations of difference as helping to manage the lack of rapport between bodies, sexes, and language, the second two define the idiosyncratic character of individual drives and the various themes, attitudes, and regimes that locate drive and position within a socially legible system. "One seeks," Ragland explains, "a replica or semblance of something lost in the first place: the (imaginary) phallus, the urinary flow, the feces, the breast, the voice, the gaze, the phoneme, the nothing around which constellations of meaning build up. We 'think' with our lost primary objects. We are ourselves made up of those *identificatory* (symbolic/imaginary) traits, as well as the real of the marks they left behind as indices of their loss."³⁰

These lost objects persist not so much in themselves, but as themes or vectors of identification that manifest themselves within and sometimes as constituting the organizational dynamics of

gender regimes. These dynamics are loosely linked to the object vectors, not in any one-on-one thematic sort of way, but insofar as the objects themselves suggest or emblemize certain possible—and multiple—dynamics: for example, the phallic signifier of difference produces a quadratic process (asymmetry as produced by the differential relation of all and not all), the dynamic of the urinary flow is temporal, the feces' dynamic is taxonomic, the breast's is metamorphic, the voice exists in the regime of the aural, the gaze operates anamorphically and vertiginously (either skewing or stuttering through a *mise en abîme*), the phoneme is linked to gesture. Although these estimate objects may in some imaginary way ground the dynamics that subjects ultimately adapt as gender regimes, there is no archaeology, no cause and effect that destines individual epistemologies and objects of intra-psychic processes to any specific regime. Instead, the objects, the vectors, and their dynamics shift in relation to the solutions the subject has produced, as individuals encounter different differences throughout their lives.

How Gender Does What It Does

So this is, very briefly, what genders do: they provide the registers through which individuals can resolve the relation between psychological and social systems, finding vectors of desire and identification that persistently resolve lack and difference and by which their drives find purchase. If we accept a Lacanian account, then these primordial objects are neither completely arbitrary, completely predestined, nor conscious. The same is true of the modes by which desires and identifications organize into genders as positions, epistemologies, and displays of desire. Gender's modes of operation are, thus, not merely taxonomic. If we accept a Lacanian account, then subjects position themselves idiosyncratically among the variables that difference introduces. In this context, gender is not an "identity" as much as it is a machine that perpetually reinterprets lack into modes of drive and desire that partially subtend self-presentation, social belonging (or not), and positions within cultural meta-narratives. No one *has* a gender; gender is the constant and provisional adjustment an individual makes among objects, desires, and

identifications in relation to the primary positions it has taken in relation to the question of all or not all, lover and beloved.

Individuals constantly negotiate among and morph through multiple gender regimes that operate simultaneously in the myriad orders—law, biology, kinship, society, cultures, subcultures—that constitute both the social map and subjects' psychical universe at any given time. These gender regimes, which are the effects of processes rather than stable, preexisting categories, are always in flux, are always approximate, and yet almost always provide the illusion of a stable, intelligible, categorizable kind. In the end, gender provides an analogical wormhole from order to order, from the psychical, to the biological, to the social, to the cultural, to the juridical, which may be binary (as it is on all institutional forms of self-declaration—□ m □ f), or may involve a complex negotiation among a plethora of gender regimes by and through which individuals locate themselves and are located within the multiple orders that constitute a culture.

Systems of Gender Regimes

Gender works to negotiate a conglomerate of organizations: intrapsychical phenomena (which have systemic dimensions as suggested above); Deleuze and Guattarian regimes organized around attitudinal vectors (such as might be defined for aircraft positioning, but articulated around drives); and first-order systems. None of these organizations is fixed or binary, but all provide mechanisms for constant individual repositionings and adjustments catalyzed by changes in environment, physical capability, and even conscious choice (insofar as conscious choice is ever completely conscious). Sometimes gender works in ways analogous to the ways that systems operate, repeatedly incorporating environment and adjusting its system to that incorporation. The slowness of systemic changes, within both psychic and social systems, accounts for gender's apparent binary homeostasis as well as the limited modes through which culture is inclined to interpret presentations and identities, especially in relation to the conservative character of its meta-narratives.

Gender also organizes itself in ways analogous to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a "regime" as a "specific formalization of expression."³¹ This formalization, they declare, "constitutes a semiotic system" which, as they warn, "is always a form of content that is simultaneously inseparable from and independent of the form of expression, and the two forms pertain to assemblages that are not principally linguistic."³² Regimes are not always regimes of signs, although gender regimes are sign systems insofar as they both unconsciously and consciously signal specific positions in relation to sexual difference and desire. Regimes also link language (broadly construed as semiotic systems) to the pleasures achieved as the temporary payoff of psychical drives. Gender regimes represent dynamic architectures of meaning and jouissance, language and body along lines that respond to and reflect individual interpretations of difference, lack, drive, and desire. Regimes take advantage of the semiotic systems already culturally available even as they might alter them. This accounts for why genders manifest themselves differently in different cultures, while also explaining why cultures have a similar binary urge.

Regimes manage chaotic variety within particular sets of dynamics organized around object vectors or "attitudes." Insofar as the drives organize around dynamics linked to lost objects (temporality, taxonomy, the aural, the self-reflection, the distorted, the varietal), gender regimes organize around "attitudes" linked to drives (the unconscious, persistent impulsion through which individuals link sexual feelings to particular acts and objects). "Attitudes" are modes of approaching and organizing the chaotic intricacies of engendering—literally, positions in relation to the given binary point of reference (the imaginary difference of difference—all/not all, lover/beloved) toward which engendering always homogenizes. In aeronautical terminology, an "attitude" describes the relation of an aircraft to a given point of reference, usually on the ground. Attitude is four-dimensional and dependent on a complex system of controls, vectors, speeds, and other variables, correlating with the ways gender regimes organize themselves in relation to a fantasmatically fixed point of gender difference in culture. Other meanings of

the term “attitude” also impart gender regimes’ rich connotation. An “attitude” is also “a bodily posture showing or meant to show a mental, state, emotion, or mood”; it is “a manner of acting, feeling, or thinking that shows one’s disposition of opinion, etc.,” suggesting as well that gender regimes are ways of locating a subject in relation to the desire of the Other in the many vestiges such desire might take.³³ Thus regimes organize the chaotic disposition of subjective interpretations of difference into a semblance of meaning that can operate within larger sociocultural narratives and fantasies, provide sets of culturally meaningful signifiers that suture subjects into sociocultural matrices, and provide a subtle coding of “attitude” that simultaneously addresses individual drives and displays and elicits desire in relation to others.

The attitudes of gender regimes marshal various dynamics and vectors that link psychological drives with cultural possibilities, producing regimes linked to the gaze (being seen, having a distanced perspective or “vantage,” anamorphosis, self-reflection); the aural (the voice, language, being heard); the breast (the temporal, the metamorphic); the fantasmatic and mythical (the Chimera); the anal (taxonomy); the phallome (gesture, behaviors, and ethics); the Phallus (a quadratic social process organized around the phallic signifier [all/not all] of difference as axes); the ethical, comprising a reciprocal behavioral bounce-back; and the narrative (normative, asymptotic), in the forms in which these themes are culturally available at any given time and place. This means that specific gender regimes change through time. It also means gender resonates through multiple psychological, social, cultural, and symbolic systems, operating as a suturing and negotiating mechanism whose constant process hides behind the illusion of a static identity, performed or performative willed option, or structural position. Gender only seems to be an “identity” and functions as such to avoid its constitutional instability. The very category of “identity” is a defensive posture that operates as a reassuring delusion of self-affirmation and belonging in relation to chaotic multiplicity.

The attitudes adapted as gender regimes organize a dynamic psychosocial system that interacts with other psychosocial systems.

Gender regimes exist in tandem with something like Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the “assemblage.” The assemblages of genders are those of order and desire, amalgamating drives, desires, significations, interactions, and transient meanings and functionalities. As a species of assemblage, a gender regime works as an abstract machine that operates among actions, interactions, and enunciations. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari map an “assemblage” as existing on two axes. The “horizontal” axis “comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression.”³⁴ For example, a horizontal gender assemblage may consist of one of many versions we currently identify as masculine, undertaken by a subject sexuated as lover, expressed as peremptory protectiveness. The masculine protector assemblage signifies passion as well as self-conceptualization through protection of an other within the collective conventions of courtly behavior. This axis is both a “*machinic assemblage* of bodies, or actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another,” and “a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies.”³⁵ The “machinic” refers to the “abstract machine” that constitutes the subject. It is governed by an equation that “maps a procedure” (88). In their thinking, this machine would ideally produce the hetero-dite; in Lacan’s thinking, this same machine would operate according to its own mode of sexuation. In gender regimes, these machinic equations are the various attitudes—space, time, the scopic, the voice, narrative, ethics—around which regimes organize themselves and that respond to and enable individual drives and desires.

Deleuze and Guattari’s “vertical axis” consists of “*territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away.”³⁶ In other words, gender regimes mark both the illusion of stable binaries and constantly shift them in relation to the particular equation or set of inter-influential dynamics that define the machine. Thus, for example, the masculine being who protects occupies a clear territory understood as male/masculine, but which may be deterritorialized by being occupied by a butch woman or by shifting conventions of what protection might mean. Gender regimes are constantly renegotiated

(deterterritorialized) and stabilized (reterritorialized) through history and cultures as bodies and regimes interact with one another and in relation to the signifiers which come to define and misdefine the bodies.

Although Deleuze and Guattari set their work in contradistinction to their reading of the work of Lacan, both their project and Lacan's understandings of psychical processes map a systemic, de-centered understanding of the interrelations among subjects (and their gaps), significations, desiring dynamics, materialities, and ontologies as shifting machines that operate like systems of perpetual becoming. Deleuze, Guattari, and Lacan agree that no human body ever coincides with the masculine or the feminine and that masculinity and femininity, man and woman, are constructs in relation to which subjects, through complex sets of negotiations, adopt positions. They disagree about how central the archaeology of sexuation is. Deleuze and Guattari "argue," as Massumi summarizes, that sexual difference "does not lie at the foundation of subjectivity."³⁷ For Lacan, sexuation constitutes the terms within which a more fundamental process of subject formation occurs: the particular relation of the subject to difference, desire, jouissance, and law. All insist on the essential complexity of these processes as well as their generally unconscious status.

Signifying Systems

If we understand subjects as systems that fashion constituting dynamics, fantasies, and objects around signifiers, the signifiers themselves derive from cultural systems. Although regimes may thematize basic drives, there is no necessary or prescribed path from any subject's system of drives, desires, and objects to any specific gender regime. Instead, through a combination of the Other—the mother, the father, the caretaker, the teacher—the subject quickly perceives that the other desires a compliance with a particular taxonomy of difference which aligns male/female and masculine/feminine. Subjects (both unconsciously and consciously) accept, reject, provisionally play along, subtly alter, and/or individualize their posi-

tions within this taxonomy, depending, of course, on how freely the environment permits their deviation. Within the general but restrictive materialization of gender difference, subjects continue to forge fantasies, try to refind lost objects, find pleasure, and secure an identity that sensibly organizes the collection of drives, interpretations of difference, and epistemologies of the subject with the sign systems of culture. Individual interpretations are idiosyncratic—almost "heteroclitic" as Deleuze and Guattari wish—but the sign systems themselves are loosely organized around certain modes of intelligibility—regimes—that themselves reflect, refind, and enable pleasure and meaning in individual interpretations.

As itself a complex mode of negotiation, as a Deleuze and Guattari machine, as sets of differential equations circulating around binary structures, gender elicits the basic systemic/extra-systemic dynamic that underlies the theories of Deleuze and Guattari and Lacan in different ways. Although the concept of the "system" is ultimately too simple a construct to encapsulate either Deleuze and Guattari's or Lacan's ideas, it provides a basic set of assumptions by which we might understand gender regimes as operating among processes of signification, enunciation, desire, stabilization, subject formation, prohibition (law), materiality, and transformation.

Deleuze and Guattari and Lacan all build on and complicate a basic systems model, several elaborations of which were put forth contemporaneously with Lacan's work in the 1960s and '70s. Writing in 1969, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, for example, defines a system as "a set of elements standing in inter-relationships."³⁸ This broad definition is not so much about excluding phenomena as it is about establishing a systemic way of thinking that depends primarily on the complex and multirarious relations among multiple registers of signification and unconscious processes as opposed to a reduction to and analysis of social, cultural, political, and subjective structures defined by binary oppositions. For example, instead of beginning with a binary notion of sexual difference as a structural "truth" that undergirds other social formations, a systems approach understands difference already as differences that are not necessarily binary, oppositional, isolated, or foundational.

A basic "first-order system" consists of an ongoing, roughly circumscribed set of processes (such as may occur in a cell) that exchange with an environment, but where the system has taken the environment into itself as a part of its system.³⁹ Subjects' genderings are also continuing, roughly circumscribed (i.e., a part of subjects' psychical and social terrains) sets of processes that are produced both by the possibilities offered by their environment and by the ways subjects have unconsciously made elements of that environment (have introjected) the sets of limitations and made possibilities part of their own psychic worlds. First-order systems are not "closed"; that is, they exchange persistently with the environment they have introjected, altering their processes. More important, there is no vantage outside of a first-order system from which that system may be seen as a system. Gender and subjective systems are perpetually open to adjustment and thus unable to exchange with other systems as a system. Any such exchange is already a part of the environment that has already been made a part of the first-order system itself. No subject can see itself as a subject; any such apprehension is already a part of its own system. Nor can subjects see other subjects without their own subjective processes having already introjected these other subjects as a part of their own environment. This is why, for example, psychoanalysis is premised on transference (the relations between subjects) instead of on one subject apprehending another subject as such. In these terms, gender is a first-order "open" system in relation to which there is no point of observation that is not a part of the system itself.

The analogy between gender and system is part of an emerging way of understanding the subject in relation to the multiple forces of its environment, which include systems of material, juridical, and signifiatory forces and which persist in the unconscious as well as somewhere between will and the unconscious. What we might understand to be the "insides" and "outsides" of subjects is an illusion produced by the effects of systemic interchange. Subjects are organizations at best, empty at worst, formulated around gaps and nothingness. Our ideas of subjective choice and self-determination are alibis for the ways individual dispositions operate as a part of the systemic operation, determining and determined by complex sets of

interrelations that flow through and beyond will and consciousness, but where will and consciousness (such as they are) are parts of the system.

Genders' combination of psychical processes (e.g., sexuation), regime and assemblage, and first-order system operations suggests not only the multifronted complexity of genders' dynamics, but also the ways these various dynamics reappear across processes and discourses. Although one may oversimplify to perceive intrapsychical processes as repeated in the relations between subject and culture (and then among gender regimes themselves), that is exactly what happens insofar as each locus must negotiate its relation to the difference represented by the others. This requires the kind of complexity necessary to gender's operations, which includes the insistence of a taxonomic impetus toward binary simplification. None of these processes represents any individual gender position; instead, all point toward the complex mechanisms involved in producing and maintaining genders. Genders, finally, are less material, willed, or "performative" than they persistently reveal; and they obscure the extent to which sociocultural organizations themselves align subjective drives, desires, and fantasies with economic and material processes in myriad possibilities, seeming cohesion, and concomitant disarray.

Finally, gender is the fantasy that negotiates a subject's drives in legible and material ways, echoing lost primary objects, playing out interpretations of difference, glossed by activity or passivity or both. How one thinks one is occupying, operating, choosing, expressing, or rebelling against gender is a part of this fantasy. Gender regimes, then, offer interpretations, practices, positions, and sets of signifiers that enable subjects to find cultural correlations for their drives and desires. These correlative regimes become a part of the subject's system just as the subjects become a part of cultural systems. As a first-order system, gender plays through regimes that constantly change in relation not only to the subjects who align themselves within them, but also in relation to the material, political, ideological, economic, and juridical systems of the culture itself, or of multiple cultures in a transglobal economy. Gender regimes are neither imposed nor chosen, but are constantly produced as a

machine: as complex systems that preserve, in one way or another, a culture's own fantasy. In the case of contemporary Western culture, that fantasy is reproduction merged with capitalism in which babies and commodities are offered as lost objects to be refound but that also compensate for the emptiness at the heart of the paternal function.⁴⁰ These objects rarely correlate with any specific individual's lost objects, but their role in cultural reproductive fantasies is to serve as substitutes for loss. Commodities are the pacifiers of culture that pose as objects of desire.

Insofar as contemporary Western culture's fantasy is patriarchal repro-capitalism (a narrative that merges heterosexual reproduction with commodity production), one of its anxieties is gender itself, since a specifically binarized and delusively symmetrical version of gender is necessary for the perpetuation of the repro-capitalist fantasy as well as to sustain patriarchy itself. In this context, gender regimes function to translate gender multiplicities into positions that can be understood within a heteroreproductive narrative—a narrative that situates conclusions (fulfillment or satisfaction) as the result of the encounter of binary differences. One of the functions of contemporary gender regimes is, thus, to negotiate between the extra-binary, nonreproductive interpretations of identity and difference and the exigencies of a culture obsessed with the fantasmatic profit (and compensation) imagined to come from the preservation of a fantasy of organized and very asymmetrical difference.

The Object of Gender

This book offers an alternative account of gender as a machinic process that perpetually reorganizes multiple sets of regimes and operations that link the psychic and the social. Genders are neither a binary given nor a chaotic set of styles, but, rather, a complex range of processes, signifiers, and dynamics that do have, albeit distanced and untraceable, some expressive link to subjective drives and desires. The modes by which genders are derived, produced, displayed, and altered are many, just as genders' processes and dynamics are conscious and unconscious, compelled and voluntary, and compliant and perpetually askew. Most important, individual genderings

are always multiple, changing, idiosyncratic, and yet generally intelligible within the binary protocols by which sexual difference functions as a prop and deploys the signifiers and materials available culturally.

This theory contrasts with 1990s theories of gender "performativity," including not only Judith Butler's famous formulation of gender performativity ("In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency"),⁴¹ but also other versions of travesty, transition, and transgender. Butler's theory of gender addresses the issue of how subjects become gendered, not what gender itself might be. In fact, the mechanics of gendering Butler's work elicits all must assume sets of cultural gender imperatives themselves fronting a series of repressive regimes—and these genders are already inevitably binary. When cultural formations define genders as binary, appeals to the performative are attractive because they appear to give individual subjects at least partial control of this somewhat intransigent set of signifiers.

Although *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity's* approach to the question of how subjects become gendered already requires the enlistment of several different processes (the production of identity through melancholic introjection of the Other), compulsions (heterosexuality), and formations (such as Foucauldian discursive formations that compel compliance in various ways), Butler's own subsequent work continues to restate, redefine, and elaborate her initial thesis about performativity, especially because the term "performative" itself is vexingly ambiguous (and hence attractive in its elasticity).⁴² The key term here is "performative." It has two meanings. As an adjective, it refers to the act of performing. We perform—imitate—attributes, and in so doing we acquire the gender identity of the attributes we perform. But how and when are these "attributes" chosen? Why some attributes and not others? How do we know what a gender attribute is? Clearly there is a vast array of these attributes, and people never perform all of these attributes, some people never "perform" at all, and some perform a kind of pastiche of the attributes. Is this then "gender identity?"

"Performative" can also mean a speech act, as defined by J. L. Austin. This is a very specific kind of speech that must comply with

a limited set of conventions. Speech acts, which accomplish what they say in so saying (the marital "I do"), must be sincere, conscious, and compliant with the contexts and conventions within which they have meaning.⁴³ If gender is performative in this sense, then individuals constitute their identities entirely consciously. While this illusion of conscious control may be attractive, do any of us really do this? Another way we might read this is as a kind of analogy—that the taking on of a gender occurs as the effect of its taking on. But this is a tautology that elides whatever it is that constitutes gender. Gender is gender as an effect of gender.

Butler's notion of performativity is dependent on a concept of gender as an "identity." The various gendering processes operate around "identity" instead of in and through subject formation itself (which is the process wherein sexuation takes place as well as links between a subject's drives and extimate objects). Although Butler refers to "identity" as the sense of unified self that faces the world, this notion of identity is a secondary formation that comes after the subject itself has already emerged. Identities, like genders, are multiple, changing fictions of position, desires, and unification. That Butler links identity and gender makes sense, given that her project defines each through the other to some extent. The coproduction of gender and/as identity then links subjects into the delusions of choice, position, and political stakes that have animated the political listing of various sex/sexuality/gender positionings in the contemporary, ever-expanding list; as Butler herself queries, relying on the work of Monique Wittig, "If the multiplication of gender possibilities expose and disrupt the binary reifications of gender, what is the nature of such a subversive enactment?"⁴⁴ The answer is that if gender is not an "identity" but a process, such a "multiplication" has always operated, and is not in itself subversive at all.

The basic conceptual problem with the performance/performativity model is that such a mechanism occurs as conscious and secondary. In this analysis, any gender "performance" comes after the subject's primary sexuation, adheres to binary cultural categories (even if these are redistributed among sexes), and appears to be wieldable. Envisioned as an imitative structure, gender (imagined as categories linked to larger discursive formations related to

a heterosexual imperative) shifts to sets of attributes. Dissolved into attributes, some other notion of gender takes the stage—a stage which, it turns out, is not a drag performance but something we call "identity." Gender's "attributes" are not expressive but "performative" insofar as gender's imitative structure (persisting somewhere—in the subject, between the subject and culture, as an imperative) constitutes, presumably in subjects, a gender identity that at the same time also becomes a mode that displays "identity."

This complex yet tautological formulation never actually gets to the point, which may be the point in the end. It appears to provide a feminist (Wittig, Kristeva), psychoanalytical (Freudian), and Foucauldian account of gendering (and not of genders), while never really providing one. Its tautological character resists analysis precisely because it is tautological. There is nothing to grasp, and if one grasps any single piece—the idea of "gender attributes," say, or "imitative structure"—the piece recycles back into the tautology itself, which functions finally to obscure gender in appearing to elucidate it. One cannot wish sexual difference away by operating gender against heteronormativity. In addition, the formulation (and abbreviated or misunderstood interpretations of it) has become so ensconced as the truth of gender that one cannot question it. This has stultified much further theorizing about gender. Instead of working from the canny insights of Butler's work—or arguing with them—the notion of a performative gender closes thinking about gender down with its own self-referentiality.

In *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists*, Joan Copjec offers a reasoned Kantian argument against what she sees as the Kantian unreason of Butler's *Gender Trouble*. "The problem, as I [Copjec] see it, with this exemplary book is that its happy avoidance of the dogmatic option simply clears a space for the assertion of its binary opposite, if not for the 'despairing skepticism' about which Kant warned us, then for skepticism's sunny slipside: a confident voluntarism."⁴⁵ Questioning particularly Butler's assumptions about sexual difference, Copjec halts Butler's tautology by offering a Lacanian reading: "While sex is, for psychoanalysis, never simply a natural fact, it is also never reducible to any discursive construction, to sense, finally. . . . This is not to say that sex is pre-discursive;

we have no intention of denying that human sexuality is a product of signification, but we intend, rather, to refine this position by arguing that sex is produced by the internal limit, the failure of signification. It is only where discursive practices falter—and not at all where they succeed in producing meaning—that sex comes to be.⁴⁶ Sexuation is where/when subjects relate themselves to these failures of signification. Genders as contemporary, scripted parts of identity are a long way away. As a process of finding modes of interpretation and display, genderings are even further away from sexual difference and sexuality.

Although Butler's "volunteerism" is appealing precisely because the incipient engendering of the subject seems so involuntary, the difficulty performative theories and practices occlude is what the persistent relation is between bodies and genders within the complex psychosocial environment in which genders have multiple functions and dynamics. The appeal to subjective will coupled with declarations of the nonessential character of gender makes performativity seem like a radical politic, welcome at a point of feminist political impasse.⁴⁷ Performativity (in its rather hybridized combination of performance and Austin's linguistic "speech act"), however, is itself an effect of a systemic operation of gender, constituting one part of a scopical gender regime at the point in history when visibility politics had been most persuasive and most conservative.⁴⁸ In its provision of a mechanism for engendering, the performative hybrid had a way of occupying the entire field, of occulting not only the nuances of Butler's own argument but also the complex systematicity of gender in cultures, of being an answer—which was no answer at all (no answer to what genders are available or how genders change and interact, for example).

Genders, Sexualities, and Desires . . .

Insofar as any gender is a machine regulating the intra-psychic processes of subjects with the cultural mélange of available styles and positions, genders channel desires and are partly produced by them. The infinite possibilities of desires, however, do not ever align with any specific gender regime. Gender regimes represent

both the objects desired (insofar as genders' displays consciously or unconsciously signal desired objects) and the drives that push toward one pleasure or another. Although a structural reading, such as Freud accomplishes in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, lays out a series of binary relations among sexes, objects, and aims, the complexity of the systemic operations of gender would suggest a far less rigid and predictable scheme.⁴⁹ Instead, desires and genders produce one another in a far more complex system of inflections, equivalent possibilities, commensurate objects, and diverse aims. The closest we might come is to suspect that any regime's attitude (its organizational theme) relates to some effect of individual sexuation, though we cannot know how anyone interprets those connections in the unconscious.

Gender's complexity spurs persistent attempts to organize, reduce, and control its polyvalence. Of course, this book is also an instance of this reductive tendency no matter how complex its formulations. Although in the systems environment of the social, symbolic, and intra-psychical processes in which genders are deployed, there is no starting point, no ur-gender, no privileged site, a book must perforce have one. Any choice will inevitably skew the system toward one process or another, especially insofar as the process of trying to envision gender is already a part of a gender regime which is organized around its imaginary outside vantage (an imaginary point from which one might see gender as such). Ideally, presentations of gender's complexity could be read starting at any point, and the chapters read in any order. The necessities of explanation annul that possibility, though nothing would suggest that readers cannot undertake such an experiment on their own.

The rest of this book lays out some of the regimes by which genders orient themselves as interpretations of desire and links to the social. None of these regimes is exclusive and unchanging. It would be impossible to treat or perhaps even identify every gender regime; this project can do no more than offer a suggestion of how this complex intra-/extra-psychical, cultural system operates. Nor can this book do more than hint at the infinite permutations and combinations individuals might evince, define the multiple ways such regimes have been produced and/or adopted, or track any specific

route from a gender regime to any individual psychical organization. One thing we may already understand in very complex ways is how such genders signal desire and are oriented toward others.

Necessary Obsolescence

The genderscape constantly shifts. Because cultural signifiers, versions of symbolic formations, possible objects of desire, and other modes by which desire is organized culturally constantly change, genderings change as well. Genderings are transient. The goth of today is now the goth of yesterday, as is the hipster. These spurious genders morph constantly, suggesting that somewhere a metamorphic gender regime (a regime organized around change throughout time) is always operating. At the same time, throughout history, gender regimes have tended to organize around the same attitudes and processes linked to desire: the scopic (genderings defined by being seen, seeing oneself seeing oneself being seen, vantage as an imaginary second-order systems site [sight], anamorphosis, et cetera), temporality (metamorphosis), the quadratic relation of binomial positionings (social gender, taxonomic genders), excess (fluidity, travesty, mixed species), ethics (chivalry, generosity), and narrative (schematic compliance, asymptosis). The differences in gender display and manifestation exist because of differences in the environmental material available through which such genderings might organize themselves. For these reasons, we can understand multiple genderings through history even as regimes continue to alter the signifiers with which they operate. Finally, gender regimes rarely operate separately, but, rather, they combine as processes producing positions that are contextually intelligible. And we are all able to read these positions without even thinking about it.

The mappings that follow, relying as they do on popular cultural examples, will, thus, always be both obsolete and recognizable. The dynamics around which these materials organize continue to operate, despite changes in the cultural landscape. Each mapping begins in the first decade of the twenty-first century and ends with the ways even those manifestations have already shifted. Although we cannot predict a shift or find any one-to-one correlation between gender

Regime	Attitude	Dynamic
Vantage	As if detached from above; chimeric	Looking; discerning; apparently third
Metamorphosis	Change through time	Temporally, historical
Schematic	Aligning with narrative roles	Narrative
Asymptotic	Secondary narrative positions	Reaching toward but never achieving
Anamorphic	Mistaken apprehension	Decoding
Social (quadratic)	The squared manifestation of binary ideals	Working toward failure (feminine); falling from the ideal (masculine)
Veriginous	Self-reflective	Seeing oneself being seen; seeing oneself as a gender
Taxonomic	Binary reduction	Sorting and classifying; digestive
Ethical	Gesture	Rebound; cybernetic

Figure 1. Some of the nearly infinite permutations of genders.

regimes, desires, et cetera, we can see gender as always a metamorphic process. Thus the book begins with the metamorphic regime.

What follows are sets of cooperating regimes, their constituting attitudes, and analyses of their functions that begin to map gender as a dynamic inter-, intra-, and impersonal machine. Here are the gender regimes the book will examine, defined by the dominant attitude by which they are organized. This by no means represents an exhaustive list of all of the existing, multifarious, chatoyant gender regimes. MOST IMPORTANT, THIS IS NOT SIMPLY AN EXTENDED LIST OF CATEGORIES, NOR IS IT AN EXPANDED TAXONOMY.