

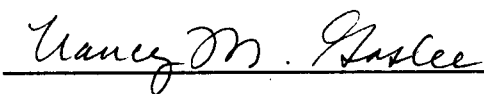
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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Kristi Larkin Havens entitled "Troubling Gender: Transgression and Postmodern Fiction." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.


Dr. Allen Dunn, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
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Troubling Gender: Transgression and Postmodern Fiction

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
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Kristi Larkin Havens
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ABSTRACT

From the violation of the incest taboo in Acker's Blood and Guts in High School to Pynchon's coprophiliac scene in Gravity's Rainbow, from Ballard's eroticization of the automobile in Crash to the ritualized rape and castration of Evelyn in Carter's The Passion of New Eve, transgression is central to much postmodern fiction. Such transgression has been read as a drama of liberation, wherein natural desires are vindicated and unnatural restraints are rejected. However, postmodern critiques of natural desire demand that we reevaluate the traditional notion of liberation and explore its reliance on conceptions of transgression that rely on models of desire that have been challenged by postmodern and poststructuralist theory.

The first two chapters of this dissertation look at the reliance on a naturalized understanding of desire in the ecstatic models of transgression articulated by de Sade, Bataille, Freud, Marcuse, Kristeva, and Deleuze and Guattari. Chapter Two elaborates a non-ecstatic theory of transgression, based on Foucault's rejection of the repressive hypothesis and Butler's concept of "subversive repetition," that recognizes the denaturalization of desire. Additionally, it argues that Butler provides a more adequate reading of the transgressive moments in postmodern fiction by allowing for the examination of how such moments are implicated in the structure of the law and how they can be both implicated in that structure and provide a critique of that structure by rewriting its normative associations.

The remaining chapters look at how Butler opens up new avenues for reading transgression in four postmodern novels. Chapter Three explores how using Butler

reveals the limitations of ecstatic readings of transgression for exploring the violation of the incest taboo in Blood and Guts in High School. Chapter Four uses Butler's conception of the lesbian phallus to read the Rocket as a site of resistance in Gravity's Rainbow. Chapter Five looks at the way Ballard's use of techno-bodies in Crash provides an alternative reiteration of sexuality and desire, and Chapter Six offers The Passion of New Eve as the best example of the critique that Butler calls for in Gender Trouble, a troubling of categories of gender identity.

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INTRODUCTION

"The irony of this deployment is in having us believe that our 'liberation' is in the balance."

Foucault, History of Sexuality: An Introduction

From the violation of the incest taboo in Kathy Acker's Blood and Guts in High School to Thomas Pynchon's coprophiliac scene in Gravity's Rainbow, from J. G. Ballard's eroticization of the automobile in Crash to the ritualized rape and castration of Evelyn in Angela Carter's The Passion of New Eve, transgression is central to much postmodern fiction. Such transgression has been read as a drama of liberation, wherein natural desires are vindicated and unnatural restraints are rejected. These postmodern dramas of liberation are also viewed as offering the possibility that the transgression of boundaries may disrupt or even radically rewrite gender and sexual identity. However, postmodern critiques of natural desire also demand that we reevaluate the traditional notion of liberation and explore its reliance on conceptions of transgression that are founded on models of desire and the construction of the self that have themselves already been challenged by postmodern and poststructuralist theory. In classical conceptions of transgression, such as those found in the work of Freud and Sade, natural desire is an essential force. For example, Sade celebrates natural desire and presents it as a powerful counter to the sexual repression/oppression of religious laws; he sees it as a force that is capable of overturning unnatural restraint. While Freud, in turn, sees desire as a force which must be mediated by repression and properly negotiated, he nonetheless grants desire an unquestioned, and thus essential, place in his theory. These classical treatments of

transgression tend to resolve themselves by affirming natural desire or natural laws, or at least by mediating between them.

Postmodernism, with its challenges to essentialized or foundational concepts, questions the notion of natural desire. The assumption that desire is naturally good and that repression is naturally bad has also been called into question by postmodernism in the recognition that, like the law, desire is also constructed. That is, like all social artifacts, desire is embedded within the structure of the law and is subject to manipulation. As Foucault illustrates in his History of Sexuality, our understanding of liberation is based on a misunderstanding of the relationship between desire and repression. For instance, in his discussion of the "repressive hypothesis," Foucault argues that repression and the law do not obliterate desire, as several of the classical models would have it, but are essential to its construction. For Foucault, sexual pleasure does not exist as a force that stands outside of the realm of the law; therefore, desire does not disrupt repression but is instead produced by the same forces which create repression. Instead of being dichotomous forces, they are inextricably linked to one another and to power:

Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement. (Foucault 48)

Desire is thus always linked to the system of restraints that both constructs and limits it. It is this rejection of essentialist assumptions about natural desire and its

relationship to the law which creates the striking contrast between postmodern uses of transgression and those of its predecessors.

In this dissertation, I will argue that postmodern fiction reflects Foucault's insights. The portraits of transgression that we find here both explore the way that law and desire are intertwined and emphasize the socially constructed nature of the most basic human impulses. Reading postmodern fiction through a theory of transgression which does not acknowledge these characteristics of postmodern understandings of desire makes it difficult to recognize the complexity of postmodern uses of transgression. The violation of the incest taboo in Kathy Acker's Blood and Guts in High School, which I will discuss in my third chapter, illustrates this complexity. Acker's presentation of the incestuous relationship between a father and a daughter cannot merely be read as an expression of a primary desire which has been repressed; it cannot be smoothly assimilated into more traditional readings of such a relationship, readings that might see it as the impetus for a Sadeian liberation or Freudian release. That is, the incestuous relationship between Janey, the main character, and her father serves neither as a violation which must be exposed and punished nor as a liberation from taboo but as a mirror for other heterosexual relationships which Janey experiences throughout the course of the novel. By creating a parallel between the violation of the incest taboo and all heterosexual relations, Acker's text critiques the way that the incest taboo sanctions a system of gender positions that allows for the perpetuation of violence against those in the feminine position.

Some critics of Acker, such as Kathleen Hulley, claim that Acker's writing exposes the social constructions "embedded" in the incest taboo and, therefore, "obliterates" these structures. Nevertheless, while Acker's text clearly reveals the oppressive social/power structures which are constructed by the incest taboo, we cannot just assume that exposing the "social construction whose political unconscious is embedded in textually sanctioned father/daughter incest" will necessarily provide a liberation from those structures (Hulley 172). Such an assumption overlooks important questions raised by Acker's text: Should incest disturb us? If it does, how is the shock value of using incest in this manner dependent on those very structures which are being challenged? What does it mean to criticize heterosexuality by comparing it to incest? These questions reveal that the liberatory potential of desire must be understood from a perspective that recognizes its complicity with as well as its critique of the structures of oppression which authorize gender and sexual identities.

Critiques of postmodernism, such as those by Terry Eagleton or Frederic Jameson, have asked how the postmodern can possibly advocate the liberation of humanity without committing itself to the valuation of certain desires or the justice of any law. In Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Jameson claims that in the "postmodern space. . .the luxury of the old-fashioned ideological critique, the indignant moral denunciation of the other, becomes unavailable" (46). And he asks whether or not we can construct a political critique without being able to ground ourselves in any standard of judgement:

does it not tend to demobilize us and to surrender us to passivity and helplessness by systematically obliterating possibilities of action under the impenetrable fog of historical inevitability? (47)

In terms of this project, such critiques raise the following questions: Can categories of gender and sexual identity be challenged without relying on an understanding of desire which is located outside the same structure which sanctions the law, or does all possible subversion need the "luxury of the old-fashioned ideological critique" to be effective? Can Foucault's version of a constructed desire allow for a political critique, or is it, as many have claimed, merely a recipe for passive acceptance of the inevitable and inescapable structures of power? Is it possible to use this understanding of desire to create a postmodern theory of transgression which denies the essentialism of desire and yet still allows for the possible disruption, and even liberation, of gender and sexual identity? And, finally, can these postmodern dramas of transgression provide vehicles for a broader social critique?

I will argue that not only do postmodern texts incorporate Foucault's insights, but they show how these insights can be employed for social criticism--a criticism that is more viable than that offered in previous models of transgression because of its rejection of utopian desires. My model for this politics of a non-utopian, socially constructed desire is the work of Judith Butler, who points the way to a better understanding of the social construction of desire. She also makes clear that we cannot construct this critique from any position outside the structure of desire/repression, since any such move is still deeply rooted in that system despite its

utopian attempts to think beyond or outside its own limitations. Therefore, desire cannot be a force which offers us the power to rupture the boundaries of that system. Instead, we must find a way to make the structure of desire/repression as pliable as possible. While postmodern critiques of essentialist assumptions make it clear that we cannot conceive of transgression as a force that can liberate us through the power of desire from the structures of repression, they also reveal that this structure is not a monolith which can be disrupted only by a powerful force from outside the system of law.

A postmodern conception of transgression, then, must be able to deal with the ways in which desire itself is socially constructed. It must be able to take into account the way that desire, as well as transgression, is expressed from within particular cultural contexts, and it must find a way to confront the possibility that each is actually complicitous with the very structures they appear to be subverting. Linda Hutcheon believes that the postmodern can both "inscribe and subvert the conventions and ideologies of the dominant culture" (The Politics of Postmodernism 11). If we are to understand the potential socio-political critique in postmodern transgression, it is necessary that we recognize the way that the ideologies of the dominant culture are inscribed as well as subverted in the fiction. In Gender Trouble, Judith Butler says there can be no "subversive or emancipatory sexuality which could be free of the law" (29). Agreeing with Foucault that "sexuality and power are coextensive," she attempts to define a place for subversion which might be possible from within the law, a site for transgression that both recognizes and subverts the

dominant ideology. For Butler, theories that are constructed on postgenital or even pre-genital conceptions of sexuality, and, I would add, conceptions of desire, which see desire as a force that exists prior to or outside of the construction of the law fail to take into account the way sexuality is constructed even within these moments of transgressive sexuality. In other words, if transgression is conceptualized through an imagined moment that precedes or follows the one in which we currently exist, then it is very much constructed by that moment even as it assumes the subversion of or liberation from contemporary boundaries of sexuality and gender. Liberation, if it is possible, can only come from within our own system and moment--from within the heterosexual matrix and the systems of power which maintain it.

However, while the potential of transgression to provide a space or moment in which the dominant ideology might be subverted or to create a place from which a political critique of the structures of power/oppression might be explored and authority destabilized remains appealing to many postmodern writers and critics, the fact that transgressive texts may actually be complicitous with the very structures of power which they are seeking to violate cannot be ignored. For example, in Gender Trouble, Judith Butler illustrates the difficulty of discovering the subversive moment within the heterosexual matrix, the term which Butler uses to describe the "matrix of intelligibility" which authorizes certain gender and sexual identities (17). The heterosexual matrix both "prohibits and produces" compulsory heterosexuality by creating certain unrepresented/unrepresentable positions (17). Yet these positions do exist and provide "critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of

that domain of intelligibility and, hence, to open up within the very terms of that matrix of intelligibility rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder" (17). Her genealogical exploration of writers from Lacan to Wittig exposes the way their attempts to theorize desire reinforce the heterosexual matrix. Yet, she nevertheless provides a version of desire and gender performance which might subvert the heterosexual matrix without having to posit some pre-ontological moment, one that exists before or beyond our own cultural moment. In fact, Butler claims that it is only by looking within the structures wherein we exist that we can hope to discover a moment which does not present a false liberation. In the conclusion of Gender Trouble, she states the following:

The critical task for feminism is not to establish a point of view outside of the construction of an epistemological model that would disavow its own cultural location and, hence, promote itself as a global subject, a position that deploys precisely the imperialist strategies that feminism ought to criticize. The critical task is rather to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity, and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them. (147)

Butler's notion of "subversive repetition" provides an answer to the problematic of using transgression to challenge or liberate sexuality. While classical models of

transgression rely on what might be described as essentialist versions of nature or desire, Butler is more willing to look for fissures within the structures of oppression. In fact, she believes that if "subversion is possible, it will be from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations to itself" (93).

I believe, then, that we can retain a sense of the liberatory potential of transgression in postmodernism, but that in order to do this, we must first acknowledge the paradoxical relationship between postmodern critiques of foundational premises and the reliance on these premises in various theories of transgression. It is possible to have a contemporary model of transgression which acknowledges the complicity of the transgressive act with heterosexual norms while retaining the belief in its potential to provide a place for a political critique of these norms as well. Butler's conception of a repetition that through performance and parody can challenge structures of oppression from within those structures allows for the creation of such a new model of transgression. That is, Butler claims that the parody and performance of gender identities have the power to "recontextualize" gender meanings:

This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggest an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities. Although the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of

hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization. (138)

It is this troubling of gender identity that, I believe, reveals the way a postmodern model of transgression might provide the space for critique without relying on foundational premises. In fact, by revealing that gender identity is not natural or essential, postmodern presentations of transgression liberate all gender identities from the binary construction of heterosexual norms.

In the chapters that follow, I will elaborate a theory of transgression based on Foucault's rejection of the repressive hypothesis and Butler's critique of the heterosexual matrix's role in the construction of gender identity, and I will then go on to apply this theory to readings of postmodern fiction, looking specifically at how these texts provide the opportunity to critique patriarchal structures of authority and/or to disrupt or destabilize gender and sexual identities. However, in order to do this, it is necessary to explore the way that gender and sexual identity and the conceptualization of the self are constructed by the structure of taboo and transgression. This relationship is at the heart of all theories of transgression, but it is also at the center of much of our understanding of the way the self is conceptualized and expressed. In order to understand both the continuing power of the classical models of transgression and the importance of Foucault's challenge to our understanding of contemporary models of transgression, we need to look closely at the way in which sin and transgression contribute to the understanding of the modern self and how this modern self is the subject of the great modern dramas of

transgression.

While Sade has often been conceived as the representative of the liberatory potential of transgressive sexual acts, he is, perhaps, better conceived as a representative of the dilemmas that notions of taboo and transgression evoke. In Sade we see that liberation is dependent on a notion of subjectivity which creates not freedom but a bind in which the promised liberation and the reinforcement of limits are inextricably intertwined, an intertwining that reflects the dramatic playing out of a paradoxical relationship wherein the freedom of the self and the destruction of the self are also interlocked. In order to illustrate that not only is Sade's conception of transgression not liberatory but that it is in fact merely an inversion of the same structure he seeks to destroy, I will use Paul Ricoeur's The Symbolism of Evil to explore the way that this conception of transgression overlooks the central connection between the individual self and the internalization of sin. Along with Foucault's discussion of the medicalization of confession, I will use Ricoeur's discussion of the way that our understanding of taboo is linked to the construction of the self to illustrate how this structure makes liberation and repression inextricably intertwined.¹ In Chapter One, then, I will explore the way that classical conceptions of transgression are imbedded in a understanding of taboo and the self which make postmodern appropriations of these concepts problematic.

¹I have chosen to use Ricoeur's The Symbolism of Evil rather than just relying on Foucault's discussion of these issues because Ricoeur's book, which precedes Foucault's writing on this subject, deals with the relationship between the internalization of sin and the development of a conception of the self in more depth.

CHAPTER ONE

Classical Models of Transgression and the Inextricable Intertwining of Taboo and Transgression

"Is the law identical to sin?"

Romans 7:7

The Marquis de Sade has long been seen as the foremost representative of the use of literary texts to reveal the liberatory potential of transgressive sexual acts. Therefore, it is not surprising that many contemporary discussions of postmodern fiction rely on models of transgression influenced by Sade. Yet, desire, for Sade, is a powerful force, aligned with Nature, that always exists outside of or in opposition to the Law. Using such a dualistic model of transgression, which sets Nature up in opposition to the Law and/or culture, to read postmodern fiction is problematic in light of poststructuralist understandings of desire as denaturalized. It is for this reason that I will offer Sade not as a model of transgression but as an example of the dilemmas raised by dualistic models of transgression that rely upon a naturalized understanding of desire and present it as a powerfully disruptive force. In this chapter, I will look at several classical models of transgression that rely on this dualistic relationship between desire and the law and explore the problems raised when an essentialized understanding of desire serves as a foundational concept in theories of transgression.

In order to understand the foundational concepts that are at the heart of Sade's

model of transgression, I will use the work of Ricoeur and Foucault to explore how gender identity and the understanding of the development of the self are constructed by the conception of taboo and its violation. The work of Ricoeur, in particular, will make clear how transgression and taboo, the law and desire, are intertwined with one another and our understanding of sin. This relationship is at the heart of all theories of transgression, but it is also at the center of much of our understanding of the way the self is conceptualized and expressed. As Paul Ricoeur illustrates in The Symbolism of Evil, the internalization of evil as sin reflects not only a cultural change in our understanding of transgression but marks as well a change in our understanding of the self and sin. He claims that with the transition from an understanding of taboo as a violation of an external rule, or as defilement, to an understanding of it as sin comes an internalization of evil that both constructs the self and implicates it in a state of sin which is equally internalized.

Most strikingly in The Symbolism of Evil, Ricoeur illustrates that our notion of taboo and transgression has been influenced by the Judeo-Christian perspective. Modern transgression is conceived of in light of this ideological perspective; however, while Ricoeur believes that the "prohibitions against incest, sodomy, abortion and relations at forbidden times" have created an "indissoluble complicity between sexuality and defilement [which] seems to have been formed from time immemorial," our understanding of and relationship with those taboos have been radically altered by the movement from ancient to modern cultural conceptions of evil (28). That is, Ricoeur shows that while specific taboos may have remained similar throughout time,

our understanding of these taboos has not. He illustrates this by looking at the changes in perceptions of evil marked by the move from a notion of evil as defilement to a notion of evil as sin.

The shift between the perspectives of evil that view it as the symbolization of sin as opposed to viewing it as defilement is seen as a moment which creates a radical change in man's perception of evil. While the symbolism of sin retains elements of defilement, it is altered by the accompanying symbolism of redemption:

The covenant being a symbol of quasi-personalistic relation, the fundamental symbolism of sin expresses the loss of a bond, of a root, of an ontological ground. To this there corresponds, from the side of redemption, the fundamental symbolism of return. (71)

Ricoeur, then, says of the symbolization of evil as sin that it not only alters our understanding of evil but our understanding of the individual as well. Everything is overturned or reconstructed when evil is conceptualized as sin: "This change in intentionality of the symbol, arising from the new experience of evil, is reached through an upheaval on the level of basic images themselves" (74). Before the symbolization of evil as sin, evil was conceived and defined externally. Although Ricoeur does not want to oversimplify his description of defilement (it is more than merely a stain; it is a "symbolic stain"), he notes that prior to the Judeo-Christian perspective of sin, defilement existed in a "scheme of rationalization" wherein suffering and evil were clearly connected and realized by the community, but externally. Ricoeur points out that this association had to change for evil to take on

its modern conception: "This dissociation has been one of the greatest sources of anguish for human conscience, for suffering has had to become absurd and scandalous in order that sin might acquire its strictly spiritual meaning" (32).

The understanding of evil as sin rather than defilement results, then, in a changed consciousness. Sin is experienced as the consciousness of guilt, but this consciousness is also a consciousness that necessarily creates an individual sense of evil. While this experience of guilt can have a unifying effect on a community, what occurs is not the same type of communal experience that existed prior to the consciousness of sin: "it [sin] cannot be reduced to its subjective measure, neither can sin be reduced to its individual dimension; it is at once primarily personal and communal" (83). Yet, it is through this consciousness that we, as individuals, are constructed. The individual consciousness is created through this moment, but at the same time, it is alienated by the subjectivity of sin. The subject is created through the consciousness of sin but discovers in this self-construction that he or she is "fully the subject of sin," and this subject realizes at this same moment that "the terrible God of destruction becomes the supreme Thou" (69). The line from Peter that begins this chapter illustrates well the connection of sin to the law. Although Peter tries to show that sin exists before the law, he is unable to do so convincingly because it is the law itself which brings to us consciousness of sin.

Sin and the law are, then, inextricably linked for Ricoeur. The law becomes the expression of God's will and replaces society as the domain of taboos. As Ricoeur writes,

the explanation of these examples by some survival of the system of taboo, sacrilege, and ritual expiation must not conceal the more important fact that makes this survival possible, namely, that the Law, as the ethic-juridical expression of the Covenant, has been substituted for the anonymous power of taboo and the automatism of its vengeance, and establishes a hypersubjective reference for sin. (83)

But the law of the covenant is also an internalized law. The Judeo-Christian perspective is founded not on an external fear--those who do evil will suffer--but on the notion of internalized guilt. Evil is no longer merely punished by external forces but is experienced as the state of existence; after the fall, man lives in the condition of sin. Ricoeur claims that the law, in turn, reveals this condition of sin:

Not only is the road that leads to justice an endless one, but the law itself increases the distance. The great discovery of Paul is that the law itself is a source of sin: it "was added because of transgressions"; far from "giving life," it can only "give knowledge of sin." (140)

The subjectivity of sin requires the consciousness of guilt, and with this consciousness, man cannot escape sin. He must internalize his understanding of evil.

The conception of evil which Sade sets himself up in contrast to is precisely this internalized understanding of evil as sin. That is, he wants to show that there is no rational explanation for sin, and he attempts to do so by looking toward Nature as the supreme authority for deciphering man's nature as well as notions of "good and evil." Sade wants to move away from the notion of the individual as evil or as a

sinner, yet the only way that he can do this is to create an alternative authority figure that allows him to reimagine the conception of good and evil. But, as I have already mentioned above, Sade is not able to do away completely with the notion of good and evil; instead, he simply reverses their values within his system. "Evil" becomes the right thing to do, the thing which is sanctioned by the authority of nature, and "good" becomes the wrong path since it is revealed as being out of keeping with the natural order of things and, therefore, is the position which is truly defiled. Both Sade and Ricoeur are aware that our notions of good and evil are constructed and can change from society to society, culture to culture. However, what remains the same in both of their systems is the relationship between taboo and transgression. Although the nature of the taboo may change in Ricoeur, from a primitive prohibition against incest to the internalized understanding that incest (or, in Foucault, even incestuous thoughts) is evil and a sin, taboo and transgression remain linked, inextricably intertwined with one another. Sade tries to destroy the boundaries of the taboo, but he cannot since the transgression which he prizes above all else must have the taboo to exist.

It is this link between transgression and the taboo that has been too often overlooked when transgression is used to discuss postmodern fiction. Although the connection between the two concepts is often recognized, the power of violating boundaries is often deemed liberatory nonetheless. Literary transgressions are perhaps the strongest manifestations of this powerful desire to violate boundaries. And this force is also often granted revolutionary potential. However, the connection

between transgression and taboo makes it necessary to ask what kind of liberatory potential is possible within this dynamic; that is, does the transgression of the taboo serve to liberate us from the boundaries which construct the individual, particularly those which construct our gender or sexual identity? Ricoeur claims that the construction of the individual is linked with the internalization of sin, that the recognition of the self is deeply linked with the move from an external understanding of evil to an internalized one, which move both makes us conscious of sin and allows us to define ourselves as individuals. Although Sade offers a different scenario for understanding evil, his system remains caught in the same construction of the self which Ricoeur discovers in the Judeo-Christian conception of taboo and transgression. In order to explore the way that this limits Sade's theory of transgression, I will first outline his theory of transgression, using Philosophy in the Bedroom as the model, and then show how this model is dependent on the very construction of taboo and transgression which it seeks to overturn.

In Philosophy in the Bedroom, Dolmance gives voice to what is often perceived as the essence of the Marquis de Sade's philosophy: "The act of enjoyment is a passion which, I confess, subordinates all others to it, but which simultaneously unites them. The desire to dominate at this moment is so powerful in Nature that one notices it even in animals" (345). The subordination of everything to the pursuit of erotic pleasure is what has placed Sade in the position of being the central representative of the literature of transgression. Characters such as Dolmance express Sade's philosophy that society has placed "unnatural" restraints on man's behavior

and that to follow his true nature man must abandon the rules society has formulated in the name of morality. Blanchot, for instance, says that for Sade "Nature is first of all universal life, and for hundreds and hundreds of pages his whole philosophy consists in reiterating that immoral instincts are good, since they are the facts of Nature, and the first and last appeal must be to Nature" (62). Over and over again Sade's heroes and heroines support this philosophy by illustrating that nature not only does not discourage immoral actions, such as murder and incest, but actively encourages them. In response to his "pupil's" question as to whether or not such actions might constitute a crime, Dolmance says,

'Tis our pride prompts us to elevate murder into crime.

Esteeming ourselves the foremost of the universe's creatures, we have stupidly imagined that every hurt this sublime creature endures must perforce be an enormity; we have believed Nature would perish should our marvelous species chance to be blotted out of existence, while the whole extirpation of the breed would, by returning to Nature the creative faculty she has entrusted to us, reinvigorate her, she would have again that energy we deprive her of by propagating our own selves. . . (238)

Sade also opposes Nature with God, using characters like Dolmance to illustrate that there is no "rational" reason for citizens to follow the rules of the church. For Sade, Christianity, or any concept of a deity, places restrictions on the freedom of the individual, particularly in terms of his or her sexual expression. His characters curse

God, call on Satan, and make generally blasphemous statements in nearly every speech because religion creates a framework of morality which Sade claims Nature denies. As Dolmance tells Eugenie, there is no such thing as "vice or virtue," no act which is in and of itself good or evil:

There is no deed, in whatever the unusual form you may imagine it, which is really criminal, none which may be really called virtuous. All is relative to our manners and the climate we inhabit; what is a crime here is often a virtue several hundred leagues hence, and the virtues of another hemisphere might well reverse themselves into crimes in our own. (217)

The framework of morality that would sanction certain acts as good and others as evil is revealed to be contextualized by and contingent on society, not essential and/or eternally ordained by God.

However, as I will illustrate below, Sade remains caught in the dichotomy of good and evil because he is unable to extricate himself from a cultural ideology in which the construction of the self is deeply rooted in the internalization of sin. Sade, therefore, while he sets Nature up as the new or true deity, is trapped in the same construction of good and evil which he opposes. Sade recognizes that notions of good and evil are culturally constructed, but he is unable to see that he is himself responding to a construction of the self which has been defined by a move, informed by Christianity, from an understanding of evil as an external force to an internalization of sin, and, similarly, he cannot admit that the inversion of this system

is not only not a liberatory act but may even serve to reinforce the taboo by serving as an illustration of its violation.

As Ihab Hassan points out in The Dismemberment of Orpheus, Sade's revolt against God goes beyond his repulsion of the "piety and tradition" upon which Christianity rests:

. . . the true cause of his revolt against the Deity is double: he needs the erotic release of transgression against authority--in blasphemy, in desecration--and he resents any power that might qualify the omnipotence of the Self. These twin motifs. . . still pervade his tales of sexual terror. (32)

According to Hassan, Sade resists the power of God since it interferes with the power of the individual. Therefore, Sade is caught in a "prison of consciousness" because "the power of Vice and Virtue, the vitality of Nature, vanish in the dungeon of the Self" (35).² The condition of Sadeian enjoyment is a kind of self-knowledge, but this Sadeian self-knowledge is an enjoyment based on a resistance to boundaries and, indeed, founded on its desire to destroy boundaries. Sade wants to create an amoral world, wherein natural powers are primary and essentially all-powerful; yet, as Hassan points out, Sade can only pose "as a naturalist who lives beyond good and evil," since his world is "anything but morally neutral" (34). Transgression is

²According to Hassan, the self becomes a prison for Sade because he wants to grant it the power of God, but he needs to have authority to transgress against in order to derive erotic pleasure. It is his inability to recognize this dynamic that causes the power of Nature to "vanish in the dungeon of the self" (34-36).

inextricably linked to the borders of both the self and of culture. While Sade wants to violate the limits of repression on the self, he needs to hold on to the power of transgression, so rather than constructing a system which liberates the self from the concepts of good and evil, he merely inverts their relative merits within the existing system of taboo and transgression, or, as Klossowski claims, Sade is caught up in the "sphere of normative reason" (18). Outrage, then, becomes the necessarily transgressive act in Sade, but its expression is an act that can never be fully realized. The only thing that can be realized is the potential promised by outrage. As Klossowski notes, "Transgression presupposes the existing order, the apparent maintenance of norms under which energy accumulates thereby making transgression necessary," but such maintenance also makes transgression dependent on that existing order (20). In fact, Klossowski claims that transgression has the paradoxical problem wherein its success negates its existence:

Transgression seems absurd and puerile when it does not succeed in resolving itself into a state of affairs in which it would no longer be necessary. But it belongs to the nature of transgression that it is never able to find such a state. . . What the act of transgression recuperates from the possible is what does not exist in its own possibility of transgressing what exists. (21)

For Sade, transgression is best enjoyed as an act of transgressing against artificial restraint, but while that restraint may be unnatural, it is nevertheless a necessary component for the experience of transgression to have pleasure or, even, any

meaning. For example, Sade imagines nature to be a force that demands the violation of the borders of religious taboos; however, nature is defined by Sade primarily through its opposition to those borders. In other words, for Sade the pleasure to be discovered through obeying "nature" or acting according to man's true nature comes from the act of violating exactly those borders it claims to want to destroy but which are, in fact, a necessary component in the equation. Sade's vision of nature requires borders in order to appreciate its borderlessness, and it is only through the violation of these borders that pleasure may be discovered. While Sade treats transgression as if it were a liberating force, his vision of nature is merely an inversion of the terms of the transgression/taboo dichotomy and not a liberation from that relationship because the actual liberation of the self from the cultural borders of sexuality would destroy this dichotomy, one which is crucial to Sade's conception of the very pleasure of transgression.

At the heart of the disparity between the perceived liberation offered by Sade's conception of transgression and the fact that Sadeian transgression actually serves to reinforce the very norms that Sade wants to challenge is his failure to recognize the implications of the internalization of evil which accompanies the development of an individual notion of the self. Sade treats sin and religion as if they are external forces that he may merely rewrite; yet, it is not just within the religious/historical perspective, such as that offered by Ricoeur, that the connection between consciousness of sin and the law and the development of the self is recognized.

Bataille, who sees himself as a kind of successor to Sade in his theory of

transgression, also recognizes that transgression and the taboos which it violates are inextricably linked: "Transgression upon transgression will never abolish the taboo, just as though the taboo were never anything but the means of cursing gloriously whatever it forbids" (48). For Bataille, religion and notions of the sacred are born out of the power of taboos, but the power of transgression comes paradoxically from the violations of these taboos. The power of transgression, the explosive nature of transgression--which is central to Bataille as well as Sade--is dependent on the very existence of taboos. Bataille's description of this relationship reveals that such an interdependent relationship leaves little, if any, room for the possible destruction of religion or the sacred. In fact, transgression serves to maintain these structures of authority since it is the horror associated with the violations of taboos which gives taboos their power:

But in the act of violating [the taboos] we feel the anguish of the mind without which the taboo could not exist: that is the experience of sin. That experience leads to the completed transgression, the successful transgression which, in maintaining the prohibition, maintains it in order to benefit by it. (38)

The way in which this relationship reinforces rather than provides a liberation from the existing structures of authority can best be seen in Bataille's discussion of the female position within the dynamic of transgression and taboo.

For Bataille, the female body becomes the site upon which the transgression of the taboo is enacted, but the performance of this transgression leaves intact the same

gender relationship that existed prior to the act of transgression, and this gender structuration reveals that women are always subordinated and are viewed primarily as objects. In his discussion of prostitution in Erotism entitled "The Object of Desire: Prostitution," Bataille's presentation of the female role as object is clear; it is the female body that becomes the site upon which the transgression of taboos against sexual contact depends. In this way, every woman is merely the object that allows "eroticism" to work "through *it*" [emphasis mine] (130). She can never be an active agent in this working through of eroticism or in the transgression of taboos. Bataille is aware of the limitations of this positioning of women, but he does not offer any version of transgression that permits a liberation of the position of women within this system. In fact, his descriptions of the feminine position reveal that women must either prostitute themselves (even within the framework of marriage) or deny men the opportunity to use their bodies as such a site by remaining "chaste." But chastity, finally, does not provide an avenue of resistance either, since the "purity" of the female body only reinforces the power of the taboo and gives greater power to those who transgress against it. In Subversive Intent, Susan Rubin Suleiman claims that for Bataille, "the experience of transgression was indissociable from a consciousness of the boundaries it violated" (76). As his discussion of the position of women reveals, this consciousness makes the potential for liberation hard to discover. There appears to be no possibility for women, in particular, to use transgression as a liberation from the structures of authority that are represented by the taboos.

However, readers of Bataille such as Steven Shaviro and Maurice Blanchot

claim that the view of transgression which is presented in Erotism is limited by the difficulty inherent in discussing something like transgression within the limits of discourse. In Passion and Excess, Steven Shaviro, for instance, believes that when Bataille attempts to present his views on eroticism in a rational discourse, his vision of transgression is altered and loses its disruptive power. He also argues that Bataille's conception of transgression is more closely linked to those of Foucault and of Deleuze and Guattari than has been generally recognized. That is,

When Bataille affirms transgression he is recalling that the logic of utility and negativity is not exhaustive, even though the movement of transgression is most frequently, and with horrible affectivity, captured for the purposes of utility, negativity, and power. (80)

Both Shaviro and Blanchot see in Bataille--although not necessarily in the text which, perhaps, most directly outlines his theory of transgression, Erotism--a vision of transgression that is not merely a negation but something which can escape from the bounds of authority. For example, Blanchot says that for Bataille, "Transgression does not transgress the law, but carries the law away with it" (Shaviro 81).

However, while Blanchot's and Shaviro's versions of Bataille's theory of transgression make it seem more in keeping with Sade's conceptions of transgression, they ignore the crucial problem that is revealed by Bataille's very attempt to theorize transgression. As was the case with Sade's presentation of transgressive acts, Bataille's theoretical discussion of transgression reveals a problem poststructuralists have found in many foundational premises; rather than providing a liberation from the

structure of the law, the transgressive desire expressed in the violation of taboos ultimately reinforces that law and the power of its discourse.

In The History of Sexuality, Michel Foucault argues that it is not the limits of discourse which create the kind of problem that Shaviro tries to explain away in Bataille's theorizing of desire. It is, instead, the proliferation of discourses about sexuality that produces this effect. For Foucault, the "scientia sexualis" is a "medicalization of the effects of confession," and this institutionalization results in the production of discourses of sexuality which attempt to discover its "truth" (68):

Situating at the point of intersection of a technique of confession and a scientific discursivity, where certain major mechanisms had to be found for adapting them to one another. . . sexuality was defined as being 'by nature': a domain susceptible to pathological processes, and hence one calling for therapeutic or normalizing interventions; a field of meanings to decipher; the site of processes concealed by specific mechanisms; a focus of indefinite causal relations; and an obscure speech (parole) that had to be ferreted out and listened to. (68)

In order to understand sexuality, Foucault believes that first we must understand the "history of discourses." However, for the most part, our understanding and exploration of this history has been one in which the focus has been on oppression. That is, writers such as Freud and Marcuse as well as Deleuze and Guattari have written about transgression from the perspective of repression and our liberation from that repression. For Foucault, as for Butler, the promise of liberation comes not from

finding an escape from repression but from understanding that the discourse of sexuality is not the discourse of a monolithic repression; instead, it is a discourse that contains within itself, already, the possibility for locating strategies of power that would allow for the destabilization of the normalizing categories of sexuality and gender. Foucault claims that the deployment of "power and knowledge, of truth and pleasures" is not "secondary and derivative," and that repression is not "in any case fundamental and overriding" (73). There are "positive mechanisms" that can both "induce pleasure, and generate power" (73).

However, since our understanding of the construction of the self is so closely linked with the concept of repression, and the very discourses that Foucault believes hold the potential to provide alternatives to repression, it is important that we look at the way transgression and repression are linked. The cornerstone of most modern conceptions of transgression is Freud's discussion of the Oedipus complex and repression. Freud rewrites the drama of transgression in psychological rather than religious terms; yet, his version of this drama retains many of the aspects of a Judeo-Christian understanding of taboo and transgression. In Freud's description of taboos, the same move from an externalized understanding of the taboo to an internalized notion of violation can be seen.

In his discussion of Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus, Freud quotes from a translation of the text which inscribes Oedipus' response, upon learning the cause of the plague, as "Where shall now be read/ The fading record of this ancient guilt?" (The Interpretation of Dreams, Part One 261). In the play, this line refers to the

unrevenged murder of King Laius; however, by choosing this particular translation of the text, Freud is able to evoke the violation of the incest taboo which is central to his reading of the text, since "this ancient guilt" can also refer to the desire for the mother as well as the murder of his father. The story of Oedipus is perhaps the primary model of transgression in the pre-modern period; yet, as Freud points out, the nature of our understanding of and fascination with the "ancient guilt" expressed in the play has changed over time. Freud claims that the text was originally a "tragedy of destiny" in which the primary conflict was between "the supreme will of the gods and the vain attempts of mankind to escape the evil that threatens them" (The Interpretation of Dreams, Part One 262). Indeed, in the play itself, it is the attempt to deny the prophecy, the will of the gods, that seems to be Oedipus' and Jocasta's greatest transgression.

For example, upon hearing Jocasta's attempt to illustrate the falsity of prophecy, the chorus says: "I obey the laws/ the heavens have begotten/ and prescribed./ Those laws created by Olympus,/ laws pure, immortal,/ forever lasting, essence of the god/ who lives in them" (Sophocles, Oedipus Tyrannus 395). These words mark the split in the text between the voice of the citizens and that of Oedipus and Jocasta. Although the horror of the couple's actual situation has yet to be revealed, it is the belief that they have escaped their destiny, escaped the will of the gods as it has been presented by the Oracles, that separates Oedipus and Jocasta from the voice of the social realm represented by the chorus. However, as the chorus indicates and the play itself affirms, the laws of the gods cannot be denied; fate will

have its day and the transgression of its laws will be punished. Freud states that the "lesson" provided by this play is "submission to the divine will and realization of [the deeply moved spectator's] own impotence" (The Interpretation of Dreams, Part One 262). While Freud acknowledges, then, that the lesson of the play may be that the spectator should submit to the will of the gods, he also claims that "modern" interest in the play stems not from its lesson but from the material which constitutes this lesson. That is, modern audiences are not drawn to the play because it provides an example of the punishment of transgression against authority but because Oedipus' violation enacts our own desires:

His destiny moves us only because it might have been ours--because the oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as upon him. It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father. Our dreams convince us it is so. (The Interpretation of Dreams, Part One 262).

The curse laid upon Oedipus as a child, then, is also the curse that we all experience as children, and this play becomes an opportunity for expressing our shared childhood wish while at the same time providing an opportunity for us once again to repress that wish. Freud claims as well that we are like Oedipus in our blindness to the truth. Teiresias says to Oedipus that "[t]hen darkness will shroud those eyes that now can see the light" (387). Like Oedipus, we do not want to recognize that the text allows for the fulfillment of the "primeval wishes of our childhood" (The Interpretation of

Dreams, Part One 262). We want to remain in the blindness of our repression, but the text, Freud tells us, forces us to "recognize" these childhood wishes:

While the poet, as he unravels the past, brings to light the guilt of Oedipus, he is at the same time compelling us to recognize our own inner minds, in which those same impulses, though suppressed, are still to be found. (The Interpretation of Dreams, Part One 263)

For Freud, drama functions much like dreams or the "unheimlich." Art typically reveals an unfulfilled, infantile wish; it allows for the expression of disruptive desires. Yet, as Freud points out in his reading of the story of Oedipus, this expression evokes a feeling of repulsion in the viewer. The viewer experiences horror when confronted by the violation of the incest taboo. Although the text reflects our childhood wishes and becomes the artistic expression of incestuous dreams, the element of punishment for this violation is crucial to our experiencing of the play: "And just as these dreams, when dreamt by adults, are accompanied by feelings of repulsion, so too the legend must include horror and self-punishment" (Interpretation of Dreams, Part One 264).

As can be seen in his reading of Oedipus, for Freud both the desire for the mother and the repression of that desire are foundational principles. And in Totem and Taboo, Freud attempts to illustrate that the "Horror of Incest" can be found in even the most primitive tribes. What he discovers in the story of Oedipus, then, is a model for all parental/child relationships and a desire which cannot be explained but, nevertheless, exists in all children. He sees the rituals of prohibition enacted by

"savage peoples" as safeguards against these incestuous desires which for more "civilized" peoples have become internalized and, thus, unconscious. He believes that the "universal skepticism" toward Otto Rank's notion that "creative writers centres round the theme of incest" and that this theme "provides the subject-matter of poetry" comes from the fact that we have repressed our incestuous desires and, again, like Oedipus, prefer to remain blind to their representation in works of literature (Totem and Taboo 17). Yet, what Freud wants most to illustrate through his discussion of "savage peoples" is that their rituals are conscious reminders of what we experience primarily unconsciously: "that a boy's earliest choice of objects for his love is incestuous and that those objects are forbidden ones--his mother and his sister" (Totem and Taboo 17). For Freud, transgression allows for the expression of this unconscious desire. This expression, particularly when it finds voice through literature or dreams, allows the potentially disruptive desires that exist in the unconscious to escape the bounds of the conscious mind. But, such a theory raises complex questions: What is the purpose of such an expression? What effect does this transgression of unconscious desires into the realm of the structures of repression, which structures Freud sees as natural to the healthy development of self, have?

In the "Claims of Psychoanalysis," Freud says that in works of art we see "an activity intended to allay ungratified wishes--in the first place in the creative artist himself and subsequently in his audience or spectators" (187). Art allows for a safe expression of desires that if experienced in "reality" would be dangerous. Indeed, in "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," Freud claims that the world created by a

writer is not unlike the play of children. We are able to distinguish between the fantasy of play and the "reality" in which we live. In fact, this distinction allows us to enjoy experiences which would be horrible if experienced outside the protective realm of fantasy or play:

The unreality of the writer's imaginative world, however, has very important consequences for the technique of his art; for many things which, in themselves, are actually distressing, can become a source of pleasure for the hearers and spectators at the performance of a writer's work. ("Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 144)

The author of an imaginative work serves, then, as a mediator between our unconscious desires and the danger that the expression of these desires in the "real" world would ferment. In this way, the artist is not unlike the minister who serves as an intermediary between the King and his subjects. In Totem and Taboo, Freud describes the minister as a figure who deflects some of the power of the taboo by "reflecting on the power which he himself wields" (33). He is a figure who protects the subjects from the overwhelming (and deadly) power of the taboos associated with the King. This is necessary because for Freud the violation of taboos, especially one as central as the incest taboo, is clearly dangerous. That is, for Freud there is no doubt that to violate this taboo would mean the destruction of the community:

It is equally clear why it is that the violation of certain taboo prohibitions constitutes a social danger which must be punished or atoned for by *all* the members of the community if they are not to

suffer injury. . . If we replace the unconscious desires by conscious impulses we shall see that the danger is a real one. It lies in the risk of imitation, which would quickly lead to the dissolution of the community. (Totem and Taboo 33)

The role of the artist is, then, to mediate the danger by allowing for the expression of our unfulfilled childhood wishes while still allowing for the repression of those desires. In "Psychopathic Characters on the Stage," Freud claims that we enjoy watching our heroes act out experiences which would undoubtedly be dangerous for us; we can safely identify with them without experiencing any real risk of harm. The suffering of the audience is mediated by the fact that our

enjoyment is based on an illusion; that is to say, [our] suffering is mitigated by the certainty that, firstly, it is someone else other than [ourselves] who is acting and suffering on the stage, and, secondly, that after all it is only a game, which can threaten no damage to [our] personal security. (306)

While Freud is talking about physical acts in this passage, acts such as confronting an adversary in a battle, the audience's enjoyment of the psychological conflicts presented on the stage would also be based on a recognition that their presentation is merely an illusion, a game. Even as this "play" allows for an expression of desires which might otherwise disrupt our lives, it enables the release of unconscious desires without actually disrupting or overturning the repression which, in turn, allows for our successful entry into adult sexuality. Art, and drama in particular, "appeases, as

it were, a rising rebellion against the divine regulation of the universe, which is responsible for the existence of suffering" ("Psychopathic Characters on Stage" 306). However, one of the rules Freud thinks art should obey is that this suffering should be mediated by the artist, that art should "know how to compensate, by means of the possible satisfactions involved, for the sympathetic suffering which is aroused" ("Psychopathic Characters on Stage" 307). In fact, for those members of the audience who are not neurotic, the presentation of the violation of taboos should allow for a successful repetition of the repression which was overturned in the art work.

In "The Uncanny," Freud discusses the power of the writer and his ability to control this return of the repressed; he claims that artists are able both to disrupt and maintain repression through literature:

But the storyteller has a *peculiarly* directive power over us; by means of the moods he can put us into, he is able to guide the current of our emotions, to damn it up in one direction and make it flow in another, and he often obtains a great variety of effects from the same material.

("The Uncanny" 251)

Yet, as Elizabeth Wright points out, in her summary of Freud's theories on art, art also contains "a challenge from a neurotic wish," but this challenge is never one that "could be corrective of the repressive system, against that system" (36). Literary transgressions, then, are culturally acceptable expressions of our unconscious desires exactly because they remain in the realm of illusion and ultimately serve to reinforce the taboos which they violate. In fact, Freud says of the closing lines of the Chorus

in Oedipus Tyrannus:

The Contrast with which the closing Chorus leaves us confronted. . . strikes as a warning at ourselves and our pride, at us who since our childhood have grown so wise and so mighty in our own eyes. Like Oedipus, we live in ignorance of these wishes, repugnant to morality, which have been forced upon us by Nature, and after their revelation we may all of us well seek to close our eyes to the scenes of our childhood. (263)

Freud's theory of repression indicates that these desires should nevertheless be acknowledged as dangerous; as was discussed above, the existence of the community depends on the maintaining of the incest taboo in particular. Yet, since they serve as evidence of a repressed human nature, their expression in acceptable forms such as dreams, jokes, or literature is important. Freud seems comfortable with this paradoxical relationship between the violation of taboos and their reinforcement in the transgressive moment. His concept of the return of the repressed even makes such moments crucial, since literature allows this return to occur in a manner which is controlled and which can find safe expression through the sympathy created by illusion, fantasy, and play.

This paradoxical relationship between the repression and expression of taboos reveals what is foundational or essential in Freud's theory of desire. For Freud, the desire for the mother and the murderous impulse to destroy the father are primeval desires. He says that the story of Oedipus moves us by virtue of this fact and that the

lasting effect of the text supports his own "discovery" of the Oedipus Complex:

This discovery is confirmed by a legend that has come down to us from classical antiquity: a legend whose profound and universal power to move can only be understood if the hypothesis I have put forward in regard to the psychology of children has an equally universal value.

(261)

Although Freud does make the statement here conditional, it is clear later in this text as in others, such as Totem and Taboo and Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, that he believes that his hypothesis on the "psychology of children" does have universal value. Most modern conceptions of transgression have been framed by the Freudian notion of repression, and our understanding of the psychoanalytic effect of transgression as it occurs in works of literature has been greatly influenced by readings inspired by his work. However, the liberation from repression which is experienced through works of art is clearly still locked in the cycle of repression which Freud illustrates in his reading of Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus.

Other writers such as Marcuse and Reich want to liberate the libido from the oppression/repression which has become part of our Freudian understanding of desire. However, while Marcuse wants to get rid of what he refers to as "surplus repression," his notion of liberating the libido is still founded on Freud's concepts. He has faith that once "surplus repression" is removed, then pleasure can revolutionize the world (or at least the lives of those alienated through the manipulation of Freud's ideas on repression by capitalists), but a kind of natural

repression will remain, which will allow us to find the appropriate balance between repression and transgression. For Marcuse, transgression and taboo constitute a central conflict in civilization: "If absence from repression is the archetype of freedom, then civilization is the struggle against freedom" (15). What Marcuse is concerned with is that the repression experienced by citizens today far exceeds that which is necessary for the survival of individuals (it goes beyond the balance that Freud outlines as necessary) and is being used to serve the interests of those who benefit from capitalism. The repression of the individual is parallel to the repression that exists in the larger society, but in both cases, that repression is excessive and denies the individual the needed amount of pleasure. Civilization has turned this conflict between the pleasure principle and the reality principle into a source of domination. While Marcuse accepts Freud's reading of the individual, he recognizes that the same structure of repression underlies society and is, unfortunately, given biological sanction by Freud's theories, when, in fact, Freud may actually merely be outlining what he sees in society: "Precisely because all civilization has been organized domination, the historical development assumes the dignity and necessity of a universal biological development" (34). "Surplus repression" offers the "additional controls" which society places on the individual, those controls which go beyond the instinctual ones which exist within the self (37). Taboos are then used to reinforce society's domination by making illicit anything which does not contribute to the procreative force of society and thus to the continued repression of the pleasure drive and the advancement of the interests of those in power. These restrictions function

both externally and internally. Marcuse claims that "restrictions upon the libido" have come to appear almost universal, and, therefore, they "operate on the individual as external objective laws and as an internalized force: the societal authority is absorbed into the 'conscience' and into the unconscious of the individual and works as his own desire, morality, and fulfillment" (46).

Marcuse wants to get rid of surplus repression, since he believes that this is what lies at the heart of domination. As society becomes more able to provide for its members, then the repression of its members should decrease: "The extent of this surplus-repression provides the standard of measurement: the smaller it is, the less repressive is the stage of civilization" (88). However, since it is in the interest of those who are in power to continue the domination/oppression of those who are not, this has not been the case. While our civilization has "progressed" to the point that repression should actually be decreasing and pleasure increasing, this has not happened. Instead, domination has been rationalized, and the revolution has been incorporated into the structure of oppression:

the development of a hierarchical system of social labor not only rationalizes domination but also contains the rebellion against domination. At the individual level, the primal revolt is contained within the framework of the normal Oedipus conflict. At the societal level, recurrent rebellions and revolutions have been followed by counter revolutions and restorations (96).

For Marcuse, art can provide some release from the reality principle; however, he

clearly recognizes that it may also serve the reality principle as well and help contribute to people's acceptance of the repressive nature of their civilization. While art may serve the interests of repression, it can also challenge "the prevailing principle of reason: in representing the order of sensuousness, it invokes a tabooed logic--the logic of gratification as against that of repression" (185). Ultimately, then, the "commitment of art" is "to the pleasure principle" (185). That is, art could become one avenue for the liberation of the libido. Marcuse believes that if the libido is liberated, then not only will society be transformed but so will the self. Through "self-sublimation," human beings will enact the restraint necessary to exist as civilizations, but without any undo repression. Marcuse does not, however, outline the way that individuals or societies are to remove themselves from the yoke of surplus repression and thus arrive at the point where sexuality can be used as a transformative force. Although art may hold some potential for helping individuals to experience the pleasure principle as a reasonable aspect of their instinctual drives, since art has clearly also been used as a safe outlet for tabooed desires and to reinforce the reality principle, it is ultimately unclear how Marcuse wants individuals or society to arrive at this point.

This struggle that Marcuse sees in the attempt to balance repression and individual freedom continues to be central in contemporary theories of transgression, as does the emphasis on the role of art in this conflict. While contemporary or postmodern conceptions of transgression seek to define a kind of liberation which is in line with a Sadeian understanding of transgressive desire, the prominence of the

Freudian framework also remains intact. Contemporary theorists may attempt to move away from Freud by relying on an ecstatic model of transgression that is clearly rooted in the works of Sade and Bataille, but the dominance of the oedipal construction means that contemporary versions of the ecstatic retain an oedipal logic, which means that even these attempts to move beyond the limitations of oedipal understandings of desire are nonetheless framed by them. Therefore, while they may seek to discover in the presentation of transgressive desires a force which can overturn repression, they find themselves caught in a double bind much like Sade. The Freudian framework, the Oedipus Complex, in many ways has come to replace the Judeo-Christian framework of sin and the law, of the taboo and the sacred, but the dualism that founds this framework remains unchallenged, merely rewritten in psychoanalytic terms. Whether defined as sin or unconscious wishes, desire in this dynamic remains a natural force, pure and primordial. Imagined as a natural force, desire remains in conflict with the artificial constructs of society, whether they are seen as rigorous religious codes, as in Sade, or as key founding principles whose repression marks mature civilizations and individuals. I will illustrate further in Chapter Two how contemporary theories of transgression which rely on an understanding of desire as a natural force remain caught in the same dynamic as their predecessors, even as they struggle to rewrite or reimagine those structures in order to discover the liberatory potential in transgression. Although writers continue to find ways to rewrite the relationship between taboo and transgression, until we recognize the interconnectedness of the relationship between repression and desire, until we

denaturalize our understanding of desire, transgression will continue to reflect its Judeo-Christian origins and will, therefore, continue to empower the law and reinforce existing structures of power.

CHAPTER TWO

Contemporary Theories of Transgression and the Denaturalization of Desire

If subversion is possible, it will be
a subversion from within the terms of the law,
through the possibilities that emerge when the
law turns against itself and spawns unexpected
permutations of itself.

Judith Butler, Gender Trouble

In Chapter One, I have shown how the failure to recognize the connection between taboo and transgression has made earlier versions of transgression problematic for reading postmodern transgression since rather than offering liberation from the structure of law, transgression may ultimately reinforce that very law. Although contemporary theorists of transgression tend to focus on the revolutionary potential of desire to undo the structure of the law, these theories rely on the same dualism which is found in pre-modern and modern conceptions of transgression. Those who find revolutionary potential in moments of transgression must often assume human desire itself is a natural and, therefore, normative force. However, the postmodern assumption that human "nature," as well as society, is constructed calls this into question. From this view, it follows that desire itself is a cultural construct and cannot, thus, be simply assumed to have revolutionary potential. Relinquishing the notion of desire as a prelinguistic or essential force means relinquishing all formulations of transgression which are based on a dualistic

relationship between desire and culture. Whether desire is seen as a natural force in need of mediation, as in the case of Freud and Marcuse, or as a force which has the power to free human beings from repression by destroying the boundaries instituted by culture or religion, as with Sade and Bataille, its conception as a natural force creates a dichotomous relationship which has been challenged by poststructural assumptions that desire itself is constructed. Yet, contemporary theories of transgression have faced difficulties in trying to theorize the social construction of desire. Typically, postmodern theorists have described desire as a destructive force, an ineffable force known only by its negative effects on the structures of language and authority. Transgressive moments, found primarily in art, are seen as testifying to this force. These theories attempt to avoid the problem of dualism by insisting that desire is extrinsic to human meaning and, therefore, not a part of a binary structure, but this move inevitably reinscribes the nature/culture dualism. Thus, like Sade, these theorists find themselves locked in the very boundary of terms they are attempting to overturn, valuing alternative positions within this dynamic but unable to escape its basic structure.

In this chapter, I will look at the work of Kristeva and of Deleuze and Guattari as examples of contemporary theories of transgression which rely on a kind of dualism for their understanding of desire.³ Both Kristeva and Deleuze and

³While Deleuze and Guattari claim to be articulating a monistic theory, as I will illustrate below, their conception of desire actually reinstitutes the very dualism they are attempting to escape.

Guattari inherit a Bataillian understanding of desire as a powerful and revolutionary force that can disrupt authority, a force which remains antithetical to and incompatible with that authority. Transgression comes in the form of the ecstatic moment, often found in literature, which provides a liberation from the repression imposed upon the individual. The appeal of the ecstatic model of transgression for literary interpretation is undeniable; it offers the seductive promise that any and all transgressive moments within a literary work contain the potential to disrupt authority, to destroy repressive social structures and/or to rewrite gender identity. It is easy to see why postmodernism, with its emphasis on detotalization and antifoundationalism, would imagine such a theory of transgression complementary to its aims. If transgressive portrayals of sexuality can be seen as moments which, as Deleuze and Guattari say, "question the established order of a society," then these fictionalized representations of transgressive desire have the power to effect social and political change. They resist the repressive structures that organize and codify our understanding of sexuality, the individual self, and society as a whole. The promise of such political and social power is, perhaps, irresistible to postmodern critics (from Hutcheon to the Krokors)⁴ who are looking for just such a force with which to

⁴Hutcheon, in The Politics of Postmodernism, is interested in postmodernism's ability to critique a number of dominant structures, from artistic genre to capitalism; however, her primary interest is in the possibilities postmodernism offers for challenging the "patriarchal and masculinist underpinnings" of cultural practice (141-44). Arthur and Marilouise Kroker and David Cook theorize that the kind of transgression which Deleuze and Guattari (combined with Bataille, Baudrillard and Foucault) call for has already happened. They use the term "panic" to describe the current state of culture, also known as excremental culture. They claim that, in fact, all codes have already been made obsolete and all that is left is for us to recognize

challenge exactly those structures (the patriarchy, capitalism, etc.) which postmodern politics have defined as needing to be challenged/destroyed. Yet, while it is clear the ecstatic provides a powerful and appealing approach to challenging the repressive systems and dominant ideologies that postmodernism is concerned with critiquing, it is important to understand the limitations of such understandings of transgression.

Because the ecstatic model of transgression is dualistic, it is problematic as a basis for theorizing postmodern transgression. The first and most crucial problem this model presents is that it assumes desire exists prior to language, and, as I discussed above, desire is seen as an autonomous force not shaped by language or culture and with a direction and effect independent of culture. Yet, an ecstatic understanding of desire as a negative force which has the power to disrupt language is complicated by the ambiguity inherent in the fact that this disruption can only be described through language. In addition, postmodern versions of transgression which conceptualize transgression as a negative, disruptive force ignore the reciprocal relationship between desire and repression. As Foucault has made clear, neither desire nor repression has the power to destroy the other because they are equally

this and then learn to enjoy it. They describe this moment in our cultural history as follows:

we are living in the age of the death of the social and the triumph of a signifying culture, the violent implosion of gender signs, and the indefinite reversibility and self-liquidation of all the foundational *recits* of contemporary culture. (The Postmodern Scene 26).

This celebration of the death of the social, as well as their reliance on Nietzsche, has lead to the Krollers and Cook being grouped with several other theorists (such as Artaud and Baudrillard) often seen as representing a nihilistic version of postmodernism.

dependent upon one another for their existence.⁵ Desire cannot exist as a force outside of repression, capable of destroying repression, because each is produced by the same forces which produce the other. Therefore, any attempt to free desire from repression is futile because desire exists only in relation to repression. Further, the ecstatic model relegates liberation and transgression to an atemporal, quasi-mystical, irrational authority defined by its distance from everyday experience. While Deleuze and Guattari and Kristeva all try to describe and explain the revolutionary potential of desire, they ultimately must move beyond the effects of socialization and look outside of language, outside of discourse, and outside of the system they see as being disrupted to come up with their versions of transgressive desire; they invoke desire as a pre-oedipal energy, as an inexplicable article of faith. While each is very much aware of the way that the self and society have been constructed by the desire/repression relationship, they nonetheless discover liberation by empowering the desire side of the equation. For instance, Deleuze and Guattari value the schizoid model rather than the oedipal model, without recognizing and taking into account this desire's deep embeddedness in the very thing they grant it the power to disrupt.⁶

⁵In addition to Foucault's presentation of this relationship in History of Sexuality, which I discussed in both my introduction and chapter one, this intertwining of desire and repression can also be seen in Discipline and Punish; see, in particular, "The Gentle Way in Punishment" and "Panopticism."

⁶My separation of Deleuze and Guattari from Foucault may seem unusual as they are often linked and Foucault's "preface" to Anti-Oedipus encourages such an association when he describes it as a "book of ethics" and an "Introduction to a Non-Fascist Life" (xiii). However, as I will illustrate below, this linking has produced readings which overlook their naturalization of desire, and it is this naturalized

And Kristeva relies on a notion of the semiotic that she believes exists outside of language, and despite her recognition of the intertwining of the semiotic with the symbolic which exists within language, she still posits the revolutionary potential of the semiotic as pre-linguistic. The value of transgressive energy as other derives from its mystification; desire becomes an article of faith divorced from debates about values despite its dependence on language for its definition.

To focus only on ecstatic understandings of transgression is to overlook the link between transgression and taboo, as well as the link between repression and desire, and to overlook the way in which the drama of liberation is regulated by social norms. It is for this reason that I believe that we must question any theory of transgression that relies on an essentialized version of desire, a version of desire that has the power to exist outside of language and the structures of oppression. The rhythm of constraint and release does inform our experience of desire, but that very rhythm is part of the culture, not prior to it. The models of transgression offered by writers such as Bataille, Deleuze and Guattari, and Kristeva provide fascinating insight into literary texts, and thus each of these writers has a prominent place in criticism of postmodern fiction; however, because they ultimately rely on an ecstatic model of transgression, they prove inadequate for reading postmodern fiction which explores the artifice of these very constraints.

version of desire which ultimately produces their reliance on an ecstatic version of desire in spite of their apparent alliance with the ideas of Foucault which inform the anti-ecstatic model I advocate.

In this chapter, I will suggest that the work of Judith Butler provides a more adequate version of transgression with which to read postmodern fiction. Butler accepts Foucault's understanding of the interconnected relationship between desire and repression, and she offers a version of transgression that provides a way to examine this interconnectedness while still looking at the critical, perhaps even revolutionary, potential offered by transgressive moments within texts. At the end of this chapter, I will discuss how Butler's notion of "subversive repetition" can be used to read postmodern fiction in a manner which allows for the exploration of the way that the law and desire are intimately connected with one another, as well as providing insight into the way these texts reveal the socially constructed nature of the most basic human impulses. As Butler notes, the mechanisms of law are less stable, ordered, and coherent than are often assumed. The dualism of the ecstatic model grants the law a kind of monolithic power.⁷ However, since the law itself is not a stable entity, it can

⁷I am not arguing that the ecstatic models of transgression intend to present the law in such a manner; however, this is the inevitable result of a dualistic split between nature and culture. Butler illustrates this in Gender Trouble by looking at the way similarly dualistic understandings of feminine desire (nature) and the patriarchy have been articulated in recent years. Attempts to define a universal version of female "identity" actually end up granting the patriarchy a monolithic position which then makes any attempt to redistribute power relations within a culture impossible; Butler says,

Because the articulation of an identity within available cultural terms instates a definition that forecloses in advance the emergence of new identity concepts in and through politically engaged actions, the foundationalist tactic cannot take the transformation of or expansion of existing identity concepts as a normative goal. (15)

It is crucial, therefore, to recognize that the law itself is not a monolithic site of power but has within itself the seeds of its own revision.

be challenged through such repetitions.

To strip transgression of its liberatory potential would be to deny transgression its most appealing feature, and I have no interest in doing that. However, to turn a blind eye to the history of transgression, to its deep embeddedness in the Judeo-Christian understanding of sin or its reciprocal relationship with repression, is to miss not only its complicitious connection with authority and repression but also to overlook what are, perhaps, the most interesting moments within literary texts--those moments when literary transgression provides critical insight into the structures of repression. The appeal of the ecstatic model is undeniable, but it is misleading in that it implies liberation exists only outside of cultural constructions. Because Butler, like Foucault, understands that desire and repression, transgression and taboo, are inextricably linked, her anti-ecstatic model is able to recognize the artificiality and constructed nature of desire as well as culture. In the quotation that begins this chapter, Butler claims that subversion is only possible "from within the terms of the law," and it is through a reading of the moments in which the "law turns against itself," revealing itself as only one possibility, that the complexity of postmodern fiction's uses of transgression can best be read and understood. The "unexpected permutations" which are revealed in the transgressive moments within postmodern fiction do more than just disrupt social boundaries: they provide insight into those boundaries; they repeat, revise, and rewrite those boundaries in a way which reveals not only the socially constructed nature of those boundaries but their limitations as well. Anti-ecstatic models of transgression recognize that while desire and culture are

inextricably intertwined, not all cultural structures are repressive; there are a multiplicity of cultural structures. We have cultural structures which both encourage and resist permutations, that are both permeable and repressive. As Butler makes clear, there are subversive possibilities within culture because the recognition of the artificiality of desire reveals that the structures that institute and repress culture are also artificial and, thus, open to potential challenge. Therefore, to recognize the complicitous nature of transgression's connection to its own taboos is not merely to confirm their inevitability, as some critics of postmodernism would claim, but to provide invaluable insight into that construction and offer a new avenue for exploring the possibilities for liberation contained within such moments without relying on any force whose power must exist outside of or prior to language or which mystifies desire. It is for this reason that I advocate an understanding of transgression which views liberation as cultural permutation rather than an understanding like that in previous models that view liberation as the destruction of culture. However, as I will illustrate below, contemporary theorists tend to conceive of transgression as a destructive force because they rely on an ecstatic understanding of desire. Kristeva and Deleuze and Guattari are three of the most prominent theorists of contemporary or postmodern transgression who rely on the ecstatic model of transgression.⁸

⁸As Kelly Oliver's 1993 collection entitled Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing reveals, the debate about Kristeva's "essentialism" of the female body remains the central controversy about the political and ethical claims for her work. However, while articles such as those by Ewa Ziarek, Allison Weir, and Mary Bittner Wiseman present diverse readings of Kristeva's use of both the maternal and feminine as categories, they all, nonetheless, reveal the same dualistic structure to which I have been referring. Therefore, although the nature (as essential,

As a psychoanalyst, Kristeva is committed to theorizing the originary function of desire as an inchoate force, and she relies heavily on the role pre-oedipal drives have for negating the law in her understanding of the relationship between desire and the law. Kristeva's schema for understanding development comes from Lacan's revisions of Freudian psychoanalysis and understands the subject to be a speaking subject who is spoken through, and thus constituted through, language. Kristeva defines this experience using the concepts of the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic exists prior to language; it is the site of "anarchic pre-oedipal" drives and desires. Kristeva refers to this pre-oedipal site or force as the "chora." In Revolution in Poetic Language, she describes the semiotic as the site of primary and unchannelled drives:

The semiotic is articulated by flow and marks: facilitation, energy transfers, the cutting up of the corporeal and social continuum as well as that of the signifying material, the establishment of a distinctiveness and its order in a pulsating chora, in a rhythmic but nonexpressive totality. (40)

representative, etc.) of the female body in this dynamic will, undoubtedly, continue to be at issue, the semiotic is always recognized as a pre-oedipal and, thus, a natural or essential force in her works. For example, Toril Moi, in Sexual/Textual Politics, who describes Kristeva's "approach" as "anti-essentialist" and claims that the association of the "semiotic with the feminine is...based on a misreading," still describes the semiotic as "pre-Oedipal" (165).

As I will discuss below, Deleuze and Guattari's reliance on an ecstatic model of transgression has not resulted in the same kind of criticism Kristeva has faced. Their reliance on a pre-oedipal understanding of desire has not generally been recognized, primarily because, as I have mentioned previously, readings of their work have tended to emphasize their affiliation with Foucault's work.

Because it is a pre-oedipal force, the semiotic is associated with the maternal. While the semiotic is a pre-oedipal force, the symbolic, however, is fully oedipalized.⁹ It is the regulatory force which institutes social structures at both the societal and individual level. The symbolic is often described as the site which contains the "Law of the Father" and, thus, is the realm of both language and law. In order to become a speaking subject, the child must enter the realm of the symbolic and leave behind the semiotic. For Kristeva, this movement from the semiotic to the symbolic occurs through the mirror stage and the fear of castration experienced as a part of the oedipal stage. The mirror stage is necessary because in order to enter the symbolic stage, to enter into language, the child "must separate from and through his image, from and through his objects" (Revolution 43). The mirror stage allows the child to separate from his/her own image because "in order to capture his image unified in a mirror, the child must remain separate from it" (Revolution 46). The mirror stage also marks the separation of the child from his/her mother's body and the first move toward full entry into the system of language. This entry is completed by the fear of castration. Although the child is detached from his mother by the mirror stage, s/he is not yet separated from his/her dependence on the mother. So, castration "detaches the

⁹Elizabeth Grosz describes the semiotic as "the *matter*, the impetus, and the subversive potential of all signification. It is the 'raw material of signification, the corporeal, libidinal matter that must be harnessed and appropriately channelled for social cohesion and regulation" (151). As will be seen below, Grosz's description of the semiotic could also be a description of Deleuze and Guattari's version of desire; however, for Kristeva the semiotic must be left behind for the individual to be properly socialized.

subject from his dependence on the mother, and the perception of this lack [*manque*] makes the phallic function a symbolic function--*the symbolic function*" and this "ends the formation of the thetic phase" (*Revolution* 47).¹⁰ Thus, the child becomes unified by recognizing the fragmentation of his previous conception of himself and his surroundings and by reconstituting his image through signification. Unity is obtained at the price of the repression of the realm of pure drives, the semiotic. However, Kristeva recognizes that the realm of the law is not impenetrable; instead, the semiotic has the power to disrupt this realm, at least on a temporary basis. The symbolic by itself is death; however, continued disruption of the chora leads to psychosis. For Kristeva, the two must be linked in order to have a productive model for human existence and change. She sees art as offering the most productive engagement between the semiotic and the symbolic. Art, then, represents a special case of the general principle of the interaction between the semiotic and the symbolic, since art is where choric energies achieve their most radical expression. The chora can be expressed in literary language, since the disruption of the semiotic is manifested

¹⁰In addition to these familiar stages, Kristeva introduces a third stage in the move from the semiotic to the symbolic realm. The "imaginary father" mediates the transition from the maternal semiotic to the entry into the socialization of the symbolic. As Grosz points out, this imaginary father is "distinct from Lacan's symbolic father (or Freud's primal father) who does not embody the law so much as represent the ideal possibilities for love for the child" (158). Thus, Kristeva offers the imaginary father as a kind of safe link between the pre-oedipal realm of unmediated desires and the realm of the law.

through art, in particular the avant-garde.¹¹ It is for this reason that Kristeva locates the possibility for transgression in art.

Kristeva's conception of transgression is outlined primarily in two works, Powers of Horror and Revolution in Poetic Language. For Kristeva, transgression is associated with the disruptive linguistic potential of poetic language. In poetic language Kristeva finds a force which has the potential to disrupt the symbolic, creating moments when the semiotic reenters the symbolic through art:

Art--this semiotization of the symbolic--thus represents the flow of jouissance into language. Whereas sacrifice assigns jouissance its productive limit in the social and symbolic order, art specifies the means--the only means--that jouissance harbors for infiltrating that order. In cracking the socio-symbolic order, splitting it open, changing vocabulary, syntax, the word itself, and releasing from beneath them the drives borne by vocalic or kinetic difference, jouissance works its way into the social and the symbolic. (Revolution 79-80)

Art, then, offers the semiotic an opportunity to enter into the symbolic. The power of the chora is made productive by its confrontation with the symbolic. This interaction between the symbolic and the semiotic, when the semiotic disrupts the law of the father, provides the space for revolution. And this space exists within

¹¹Grosz claims that Kristeva is "fascinated" with the avant-garde because the texts of such writers as Lautreamont, Artaud, and Mallarme "are more disturbing because they provide a more direct expression of the semiotic than is usually possible in more conventional symbolic representational systems" (152).

language, although the semiotic is a force which exists external to the force of the law, outside of language. Art thus provides a revolutionary site within the structure of the law to subvert that law.

Kristeva's conception of transgression, like that of Bataille, to whose work she is responding, seems to offer a liberatory escape from the law and reveals that she recognizes the connection between the sacred and the tabooed. She recognizes this connection but ultimately claims that what I have called the inextricable intertwining of taboo and transgression is undone by art. Rather than replace religious forms, as some may claim, art--contemporary literature, in particular--provides a "crossing over of dichotomous categories of Pure and Impure, Prohibition and Sin, and Morality and Immorality" (Powers 16). In fact, contemporary literature is able to acknowledge

the impossibility of Religion, Morality, and Law--their power play,
their necessary and absurd seeming. Like perversion, it takes
advantage of them, gets round them, and makes sport of them.

(Powers 16)

And Kristeva herself claims that what happens in art has the power to bring about social change: "textual experience reaches the very foundation of the social--that which is exploited by sociality but which elaborates and can go beyond it, either destroying or transforming it" (Revolution 67).

The disruption of the symbolic in art can be retranslated to society as a whole. Suzanne Guerlac, in "Transgression in Theory: Genius and the Subject of La Revolution du langage poetique," claims that this revolutionary potential extends

beyond the limits of the text: "The notion of the text is expanded to stand for a signifying practice which opens out directly onto the social-historical world. . . Text, in turn, is dislodged from the printed page and displaced to the social-historical world" (240). For Kristeva, the revolutionary potential of art extends into the broader world. But this is precisely what is at issue in debates about Kristeva's understanding of revolution and transgression. Can the release of semiotic energies achieve any form of transition, or do they merely serve as a kind of release valve which allows the symbolic to maintain its power? Does art constitute a moment in which a pre-oedipal force breaks through the law of the father and contests that law? Or is this relationship a reconstructing of the Freudian understanding of repression, wherein art allows for the release of repressed desires and then reinstitutes the law of the father?

This is exactly the criticism which has been raised by feminist critics in response to Kristeva's theorization of the liberatory potential of choric energies. Jane Gallop's response, in The Daughter's Seduction, is typical; she asks whether Kristeva's understanding of the semiotic offers feminism "progress or regression?" (129). Further, she claims that feminists must ask themselves whether the "maternal is conservative and imaginary or disruptive and semiotic" since "heterosexuality is always implied by maternity, except in the case of the Virgin" (129). Gallop is asking, then, if Kristeva maintains these structures, what kind of liberation is possible? Judith Butler, in her critique of Kristeva in Gender Trouble, makes clear why such a dualistic relationship between the symbolic and the semiotic does not

reveal the subversive potential that Kristeva grants it. According to Butler, the semiotic is never able to sustain its disruption of the symbolic and is, thus, not truly revolutionary. She asks, if "the semiotic promotes the possibility of the subversion, displacement, or disruption of the paternal law, what meanings can those terms have if the Symbolic always reasserts its hegemony?" (80). The chora cannot provide a site for a productive dualism because of the reassertion of the symbolic. For Butler, Kristeva's reliance on a conception of the semiotic as a return of the maternal energy which exists prior to language creates a version of transgression that ultimately fails, since its subversive potential can only be founded in a force, the semiotic, which exists outside of and prior to language. In fact, she says,

upon careful scrutiny of her descriptions of the semiotic function within language, it appears that Kristeva reinstates the paternal law at the level of the semiotic itself. In the end, it seems Kristeva offers us a strategy of subversion that can never become a sustained political practice. (81)

This is because, for Butler, no version of subversion or transgression which relies on a "libidinal economy," which exists in "an ontological status prior to language itself," can provide a workable or practical base for political practice (80).

Butler illustrates the limits of Kristeva's theory of subversion by noting that within her understanding of transgression, sustained disruption of the symbolic leads to psychosis. While Kristeva grants the semiotic incredible powers to disrupt the symbolic, she, finally, merely repeats what I have referred to as the inextricable link

between the taboo and the sacred or between transgression and the law. Butler says,

Obedient, then, to syntactical requirements, the poetic-maternal practices of displacing the paternal law always remain tenuously tethered to that law. Hence a full-scale refusal of the symbolic is impossible, and a discourse of "emancipation," for Kristeva, is out of the question. (86)

Yet, ironically, Butler is trying to articulate a position that is not as distinct from Kristeva as her critique would imply. Butler is also interested in those moments of "subversion, displacement, or disruption" that Kristeva locates in the semiotic. And she recognizes that a "full-scale refusal of the symbolic is impossible."

In trying to articulate a position from within language for revolution, Kristeva's theory of transgression parallels that of Butler's in many ways. However, Butler, nonetheless, questions whether or not the semiotic is a "viable construct" or a "knowable experience." And it is Kristeva's defining of the semiotic as a pre-linguistic force which turns subtle differences in perspective into crucial conflicts. The problem of Kristeva's reliance on a conception of desire which exists outside language is that it holds on to a utopianism and to a language of simplistic binaries. For Butler, any understanding of desire that is imagined as outside the existing power structure is denying its deep embeddedness in that structure and, therefore, doomed to reinstate unwittingly that structure instead of subverting it. This applies particularly to constructions of sexuality and power relations:

If sexuality is culturally constructed within existing power relations,

then the postulation of a normative sexuality that is "before," "outside," or "beyond" power is a cultural impossibility and a politically impracticable dream, one that postpones the concrete and contemporary task of rethinking subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity with the terms of power itself. (Gender Trouble 30)

Agreeing with Foucault, she claims that there is no position which is "free from the law" and, thus, that any theory of transgression which imagines such a position is merely failing to recognize its own complicitious relationship with the structure of law.

While Kristeva's reliance on a model which is dependent on an understanding of desire as pre-oedipalized desire and which locates the potential for disruption in this pre-linguistic force has been one of the most centrally debated issues about her work, Deleuze and Guattari's conception of desire has not generally been questioned. Deleuze and Guattari's critique of the oedipalization of culture and its production of desire is typically read in Foucaultian terms. Anti-Oedipus is in many ways an exploration of the notion that desire is produced by the same structure as repression. However, while their critique of the production of desire reveals insights similar to those of Foucault, insights which also inform Butler's work, their descriptions of schizophrenic desire reveal it to be a force that exists outside of the oedipalization which structures culture and, thus, to be a force not produced by the same forces that produce repression but something external to them. By comparing Deleuze and Guattari's theory of transgressive desire with Kristeva's, I will illustrate that while

there are differences between the writers' descriptions of transgression and society, Deleuze and Guattari's theory of transgression can be subjected to the same critiques as Kristeva's works.¹² Kristeva wants to offer a version of transgression which will allow for revolution without necessarily sanctioning the "demolishing [of] entire social sectors" (Deleuze and Guattari 116). Yet, her version of transgressive desire has many of the qualities of schizoid desire and recognizes many of the same qualities of the law, taboo, and transgression outlined by Deleuze and Guattari. Kristeva believes that Deleuze and Guattari "are right to stress the destructuring and a-signifying machine of the unconscious"; yet, she thinks that their "schizophrenic flow" is limited because it "exists only through language" (Revolution 17). Therefore, while she finds their description of the "schizophrenic flow" appealing, she nonetheless finds it incomplete because it does not have the power to exist beyond language. However, as I will discuss below, the desire which empowers the "schizophrenic flow" does exist beyond language and the structures of society because it is an essentialized force, whose power for revolution and disruption is unquestioned by Deleuze and Guattari.

The primary difference that Kristeva sees between her theory and Deleuze and

¹²In fact, the work of Deleuze and Guattari is more often described in terms which make it a counter to Kristeva's. They are seen as offering a version of desire which rather than disrupting and then possibly reconstructing the realm of the symbolic could actually dismantle it. However, by looking at the ways that their ideas parallel rather than contrast Kristeva's version of desire, I will illustrate that although their visions of the ultimate result of the conflict between desire and culture are different, their conceptions of the terms of this dynamic are similar and, thus, equally problematic for use in a postmodern theory of transgression.

Guattari's is that Kristeva conceives of a disruption that can exist "in, and through language; toward, in, and through the exchange system and its protagonists--the subject and his institutions" (Revolution 17). Yet, the actual difference in their theories lies not in a difference of forces which exist outside of language but in Kristeva's recognition and exploration of the interaction between pre-oedipal or pre-linguistic conceptions of desire and the structures of law and society, between the semiotic and the symbolic. Kristeva describes this relationship as follows:

This heterogeneous process, neither anarchic, fragmented foundation nor schizophrenic blockage, is a structuring and de-structuring *practice*, a passage to the outer *boundaries* of the subject and society. Then--and only then--can it be jouissance and revolution. (Revolution 17)

Because Kristeva more willingly recognizes that her theory of transgression is dependent on an understanding of a desire which exists outside of language, she addresses the nature of this relationship and attempts to articulate the way revolution exists within it. Kristeva's version of this desire has clear parallels to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of desire; however, because she acknowledges the way that this conception of desire is based on an understanding of desire which can exist outside of the system, she is able to address its interaction with the system in a way that they are not able to do.

Unlike Kristeva, Deleuze and Guattari believe that the "law of the father" must be completely undone in order to free human beings from repression. Before I look further at the parallels between Kristeva and Deleuze and Guattari, therefore, it is

important to outline their claims about this need and the role of desire in accomplishing this release.¹³ In Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Deleuze and Guattari claim that the only way to escape repression is to undo the oedipalization of culture. Drawing upon the ideas of Marcuse and Reich that surplus repression leads to the oppression of the individual and society, and eventually, for Reich, to fascism, Deleuze and Guattari come to the conclusion that oppression can be removed only by liberating the libido from all repression. It is not merely a matter of returning to Freud or reinstating the proper balance between repression and transgression within the individual and society; the boundaries of the self as they have been constructed by Freud must be exploded if we are to free society from the unnecessary bounds that the repressive effect of the oedipalization of culture has imposed upon it. For Deleuze and Guattari everything, every aspect of our culture, family and individuals, is invested with desire and what we must do is broaden our understanding of desire and the social, of desire and production, beyond the conceptual limits that are the result of our conceiving of the self and desire through the Oedipal drama. However, unlike Freud or Marcuse, they believe that no mediation of desire is necessary:

We maintain that the social field is immediately invested by desire, that

¹³In addition, this will help illustrate why it is that Deleuze and Guattari are more likely to be aligned with the work of Foucault than with Kristeva. This critique is the most powerful and provocative aspect of Anti-Oedipus and for that reason the most discussed aspect of the work. Ironically, however, this critique is undermined by the fact that in order to find liberation from this oedipalization, they rely on a version of desire that remains unquestionably outside of the oedipal structure.

it is the historically determined product of desire, and that libido has no need of any mediation or sublimation, any psychic operation, any transformation, in order to invade and invest the productive forces and the relations of production. *There is only desire and the social, and nothing else.* (29)

Rather than challenging excess repression and rediscovering the proper mediation between desire and repression, Deleuze and Guattari believe that desire must be removed from the psychoanalytic manacle which codifies desire in order to restrain its revolutionary potential.

The oedipalization of the self and society has created a culture wherein everything is informed and understood through the Oedipus complex. For Deleuze and Guattari, the Oedipus complex has become the new holy family, the divine trinity of "daddy-mommy-me." Psychoanalysis has replaced religious symbolism with the oedipal triangle as the controlling "dogma" that governs and organizes society. Every relationship is defined and determined by the intersections of this oedipal triangle. Not only does psychoanalysis propose to explain the Freudian oedipal stage but all stages of development and positions of desire: "It makes Oedipus into a referential axis not only for the pre-oedipal phases, but also for the para-oedipal varieties, and the exo-oedipal phenomena" (52). Deleuze and Guattari claim, however, that the psychoanalytic presentation of oedipal desire masks its own association with the desiring machines which exist "underneath Oedipus, through Oedipus, [and] behind Oedipus" (56). The family duplicates and repeats the structures of the social realm

"because the family, instead of constituting and developing the dominant factors of social reproduction, is content to apply and envelop these factors in its own mode of reproduction" (264). The Oedipus complex privatizes the capitalist structure of reproduction. It gives the individual a personal universe which reflects the social whole, a whole whose limits are marked by capitalism. For Deleuze and Guattari, like Marcuse, capitalism uses the individual's understanding of repression to place limits on and maintain control of the social. And the Oedipal triangle provides the individual and the family with a "universal history" which reinforces the limits imposed upon the social by capitalism:

Oedipus is this displaced or internalized limit where desire lets itself be caught. The Oedipal triangle is the personal and private territoriality that corresponds to all of capitalism's efforts at social reterritorialization. (266)

We are unable to construct any version of desire or repression, transgression or taboo, which is free from this totalizing framework. Like Marcuse, Deleuze and Guattari believe that capitalism uses Freudian theory to repress and maintain individuals. However, for Deleuze and Guattari, desire must have a radical purity; they resist compromise of any form since such a compromise would deny the liberatory potential of desire. The problem with the oedipalization of culture is that psychoanalysis has allowed desire to compromise itself into submission, has stripped it of its revolutionary force. Unlike Kristeva who revises but still retains the oedipal structure, Deleuze and Guattari want to discover a force which has the power to

dismantle this structure completely. Yet, ironically, it is here that the parallels between Kristeva and Deleuze and Guattari can begin to be seen because in order to construct an alternative to the oedipalization of society, Deleuze and Guattari come to posit a version of desire which is itself pre-oedipal, a force which looks very much like Kristeva's chora.

For Deleuze and Guattari the "prime function incumbent on the socius has always been to codify the flows of desire, to inscribe them, to record them, to see to it that no flow exists that is not properly damned up, channeled, regulated" (33). The Oedipus conflict is the primary way that this regulation has been achieved. Our understanding of desire is filtered through this conflict; it has become our central way of interpreting both the construction of the individual and the construction of the society. Everything about the individual and society can be seen through the lens of the "daddy-mommy-me" triad. The oedipalization of desire is an attempt to contain it within this triad, but for Deleuze and Guattari the fragmentary, "hodge-podge" character of desire makes such containment impossible, since even the "satisfaction the handyman experiences when he plugs something into an electric socket or diverts a stream of water can scarcely be explained in terms of 'playing mommy and daddy,' or by the pleasure of violating a taboo"(7). Not only does the law create the very desires that it prohibits, but in doing so it also creates an understanding of the self which is dependent on experiencing the very desires which are prohibited:

But a strange sort of reasoning leads one to conclude that since *it* is forbidden, *that very thing* was desired. In reality, global persons--

even the very form of persons--do not exist prior to the prohibitions that weigh on them and constitute them, any more than they exist prior to the triangulation into which they enter: desire receives its first complete objects and is forbidden them at one and the same time.

Therefore it is the same Oedipal operation that lays the foundations for the possibility of its own "resolution," by way of a differentiation of persons in conformity with the prohibition, as well as the possibility for its own failure or stagnation. . . (71).

Deleuze and Guattari, like Foucault, recognize that desire is linked to the law, to a system of restraints that constructs as well as limits it. They recognize that forbidden desires are not restrained by the law but born of it. And, in fact, the balanced interdependence of these forces structures the individuation of the self. In this way they seem to be aware of the very inextricable intertwining of desire and repression, taboo and transgression, that I discussed in chapter one.

However, for Deleuze and Guattari there is an aspect of desire which escapes from this situation. This is desire which has not been oedipalized, desire which has not been "harnessed to the yoke of mommy-daddy" (50). Therefore, while Deleuze and Guattari recognize that desire is linked to the law, they still posit a version of desire that not only exists outside of the law, prior to it, but which has the power to disrupt that law and, in fact, to destroy all of its boundaries. The forces of social repression, therefore, encourage and depend on the oedipalization of culture in order to maintain the repression of the libido, to keep us from understanding the

revolutionary force inherent in conceiving of desire as it is, a desiring machine:

If desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire, no matter how small is capable of calling into question the established order of a society: not that desire is asocial, on the contrary. But it is explosive: there is no desiring-machine capable of being assembled without demolishing entire social sectors. (116)

Deleuze and Guattari conceive of desire, then, as an unquestionably revolutionary force. This is a force which looks a great deal like Kristeva's chora; it too is pre-oedipal and, therefore, has the power, as does the semiotic, to escape from and destroy oedipalization. Although they admit that desire is shaped by repression, that the object of desire can be determined by repression, they persist in presenting desire as the complete antithesis of repression--a desire destructive of repression in its very essence. This does, however, mark a crucial point of disagreement between Deleuze and Guattari and Kristeva, since the sustained disruption of the symbolic by the semiotic would lead to psychosis in Kristeva's theorization of this relationship. Although Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize desire in terms resembling Kristeva's, their notions of liberation differ from hers; they seek the complete destruction of all forms of law and all forms of repression. But if, as Deleuze and Guattari claim, all positions of desire have this potential to disrupt the law and the social sector, then how is it possible that desire has been repressed by oedipalization and psychoanalysis? If it exists external to the system and has the power to destroy that system, how can it be restrained by that system? Must it be incorporated into the symbolic or remain

unspeakable or unspoken? Deleuze and Guattari cannot explain what distinguishes the natural antithesis of law and desire from what appears to be an equally natural collusion between the two. Instead, they present a view of desire which is in conflict; in one instance, desire has the potential, in its essence, to dismantle repressive social systems completely, but in another, it is a force whose power has been dismantled by the oedipalization of our society by psychoanalysis. The "nature" of repression is unclear in this dynamic. Is it an illusion, merely a mistake, or is it also a primal force?

The question of repression is ignored in favor of a celebration of desire's disruptive power. As a counter to the Oedipal drama as a description of desire, they advocate that we conceive of desire from the position of the schizophrenic. The "schizo is at the very limit of the decoded flows of desire" and "the very limit of the social codes" (40). Schizoid desire is an unmediated desire; it flows, and it "is revolutionary in its essence" (116). This version of desire is a force which exists outside of the Oedipal framework; its power to disrupt the social order, to even destroy it, is unquestioned.¹⁴ Underlying the oedipal drama, underlying all

¹⁴In Deleuze and Guattari's description of society, different types of machines represent different aspects of culture and the self and the interaction between these machines is crucial. They use the term machines to reinforce their claim that "everything is production" (4). They want to move away from the man/nature dichotomy and see all relationships as produced. However, their version of desire inadvertently reinstates the very dynamic they are seeking to avoid because it becomes a naturalized force and retains many of the same elements attributed to natural understandings of desire previously discussed--it is fragmented, disruptive, and resistant to repression.

organizing systems is a desire which has the power to undo those very systems, and this power is naturalized and essential. For Deleuze and Guattari, as it is for Kristeva, art becomes the site for this disruption. Deleuze and Guattari describe this disruption as a desiring machine. Desiring machines are not meant to run smoothly, without repair, but instead function best when they are continually breaking down:

Desiring machines...continually break down as they run, and in fact run only when they are not functioning properly: the product is always an offshoot of production, implanting itself upon it like a graft, and at the same time the parts of the machine are the fuel which makes it run.

(31)

Desiring-machines are the machines that disrupt the functions of other machines.

They are "used to short-circuit social production, and to interfere with the reproductive function of technical machines by introducing an element of dysfunction" (31). The artist allows disruptive elements to be turned into a desiring machine; they become the vehicle through which the negative force of desire enters the social realm. For instance, looking at the work of Arman, Cesar, Dali and Ravel, Deleuze and Guattari claim that such artists take objects and turn them into desiring machines:

The artist is the master of objects; he puts before us shattered, burned, broken-down objects, converting them to the regime of desiring-machines, breaking down is part of the very functioning of desiring machines...the work of art is itself a desiring-machine. (32)

These desiring machines resist oedipalization and disrupt technical machines, such as

social production.

Art, then, reveals an unoedipalized desire. Deleuze and Guattari make this clear by looking at the work of Artaud, Beckett, and the case of Judge Schreber. Artaud gives voice to a position which "break[s] through the simplistic terms and functions of the Oedipal triangle" because he refuses to "believe in father/ in mother, got no/papamummy" (14). Like the schizo, he refuses to position himself within the oedipal social code. Beckett's Malone represents the schizophrenic position which Deleuze and Guattari advocate because he "inscribes on his own body the litany of disjunctions, and creates for himself a world of parries where the most minute of permutations is supposed to be a response to the new situation" (12). Deleuze and Guattari's description of the schizoid experience as it is represented by Judge Schreber aligns it with what I have called the ecstatic moment. Schreber's body comes to represent the body without organs; his descriptions of his experience reveal "a band of intensity, a zone of intensity on his body without organs" (19). It defies "representation" and instead is "all life and lived experience" (19). It is a moment which "transgresses" the limitations imposed by social codes and is

[n]othing but bands of intensity, potentials, thresholds, and gradients.

A harrowing, emotionally overwhelming experience, which brings the schizo as close as possible to matter, to a burning, living center of matter. (19)

This dramatization of the ecstatic moment is meant to prove desire's originary status, its essential opposition to human meaning. As such, it, as we have seen, resembles

Kristeva's theory. Both theories invoke primitive dichotomies. That is, these writers while fully aware of the contextualized and constructed nature of the very terms they are trying to establish find themselves unable to theorize transgression without stepping outside of the structures/systems of law in which they are operating in order to find avenues for subversion, transgression, and, ultimately, liberation. Both Kristeva and Deleuze and Guattari return to a naturalized version of desire, then; they reinstate the nature/culture dualism which founds classical models of transgression and which has been challenged by poststructural understandings of desire as constructed. Thus, by finding the source of revolution, the potential for liberation, in pre-ontological or post-ontological forces such as Deleuze and Guattari's desire or Kristeva's chora, these writers, the most prominent contemporary theorists of transgression, repeat the pattern that prohibits Sade from transgressing the very boundaries he seeks to violate. Even as they recognize the need to rewrite or even to destroy the models of desire/repression that are at the heart of classical models of transgression, they envision a version of desire that ultimately returns to the same dualism which makes those previous models problematic for reading postmodern fiction and exploring desire as a constructed, not essential, force. Kristeva acknowledges the inextricable intertwining between transgression and taboo, the semiotic and the symbolic; however, Butler, as discussed above, argues that Kristeva's reliance on desire as a force which is "'before,' 'outside,' or 'beyond' power" makes it "a cultural impossibility and a politically impracticable dream" (30). To discover a theory of transgression that has cultural possibilities and is politically

practical, then, we must move away from the nature/culture dualism which founds classical models of transgression; we must find a way of understanding desire as denaturalized and as much a construction as the structures of the law.

Butler's conception of desire offers just such a model; she believes that desire and the law are both constructed and that subversion is only possible from within the structure of the law. Her "strategy of subversion" is to seek the moments within that system wherein the law "turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself" (93). Rather than trying to discover the subversive potential of desire from outside this structure, Butler looks to the structure itself and the multiplicity of desires that already exist within this structure. Deleuze and Guattari do not need to locate desire outside of the Oedipal drama; Kristeva does not need a return to the pre-linguistic maternal. The subversive potential exists within the system if we focus instead on the way that certain desires and gender identities are sanctioned as acceptable while others remain unsanctioned and stigmatized by the law. Deleuze and Guattari recognize this themselves when they note that desire is restricted and oversimplified through the oedipalization of the self and culture. Yet, while they recognize this as proof that desire has been repressed, they do not see that this in and of itself produces the possibility for subversion. For Butler, the desiring machine, the body without organs, exists within the oedipalization of culture and provides the opportunity for subversion because it refuses or refutes the limits and categorization imposed upon it:

That penis, vagina, breasts and so forth, are *named* sexual parts is both

a restriction of the erogenous body to those parts and a fragmentation of the body as a whole. Indeed, the "unity" imposed upon the body by the category of sex is a "disunity," a fragmentation and compartmentalization, and a reduction of erotogenicity. (Gender Trouble 114)

The naming of sexual parts and the marking of bodies as gendered is an attempt to contain the body and desire. However, the constructions of gender identity and sexuality cannot contain the multiplicity of positions and identities which exist and therefore, produce "positions that are intrinsically impossible to embody" (122). The law thus engenders its own opposition. Butler claims,

the sexuality that emerges within the matrix of power relations is not a simple replication or copy of the law itself, a uniform repetition of a masculinist economy of identity. The productions swerve from their original purposes and inadvertently mobilize possibilities of "subjects" that do not merely exceed the bounds of cultural intelligibility, but effectively expand the boundaries of what is, in fact, culturally intelligible. (29)

The moments within the law which are not "culturally intelligible" do not represent an external force but, rather, reveal the sites for the contestation of that law from within itself. Deleuze and Guattari's descriptions of the "body without organs" reveal just such a site. Therefore, while they correctly recognize the potential for critique that exists within the system, they mistakenly locate this potential in nature, external to the

social system rather than inside it.

Both Deleuze and Guattari and Kristeva present provocative notions of the revolutionary potential of desire, notions which hold great appeal for literary critics as well. However, while postmodern literature often echoes the rhetoric of ecstatic desire, I will argue that its deep distrust of naturalized notions of desire makes this model unworkable and that Butler's notion of subversive repetition provides a more effective theory of transgression for reading postmodern fiction.¹⁵ In Gender Trouble, Butler gives the example of drag to explain the subversive potential which can exist within the structures of the law. The subversive potential of drag comes not from the fact that it can explode all social laws but from its challenge to the power of the heterosexual matrix to contain and control all sexual identity. She says, "the perception of the 'feminine' identity' would be juxtaposed on the 'male body' as ground, but both terms would through juxtaposition, lose their internal stability and distinctness from each other" (123). This juxtaposition does not destroy all gendered identity, but it does provide us with an understanding that "desire admits of much greater complexity, for the play of masculine and feminine" (123). For Butler, subversion comes from being able to examine the way transgressive representations of desire explore and complicate our understanding of the "highly complex and structured production of desire" (123). In Bodies that Matter, Butler elaborates further on the way subversive potential can be an effective way to challenge

¹⁵I have already discussed this concept some in the introductory chapter, on pages 7-10. In addition, I will elaborate more on Butler's ideas and how they provide an effective way to read postmodern fiction further in the chapters on fiction that follow.

normative heterosexuality. As she points out in the "Introduction," her conception of gender as a performance does not mean that gender is like a costume that can be put on and taken off at will; gender identity is much too complex to be undone in this manner. However, what gender performances such as drag can do is to expose the regulatory norms which structure gender and sexual identity.

In Bodies that Matter, Butler claims that gender and sexual identities are established based on the reiteration of norms that regulate and constrain identification through a process of exclusion. However, the reiteration of norms not only produces gender identity, but it also contains the potential for destabilizing the very norms it institutes. Normative heterosexuality relies on a naturalization of desire in order to sanction the reiteration of certain desires (heterosexuality, for instance) and to deny others (homosexuality, incest, etc.). Butler says,

As a sedimented effect of a reiterative or ritual practice, sex acquires its naturalized effect, and, yet, it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm. This instability is the *deconstructing* possibility in the very process of repetition, the power that undoes the very effects by which "sex" is stabilized, the possibility to put the consolidation of the norms of "sex" into a potentially productive crisis. (Bodies that Matter 10).

In terms of transgressive moments in postmodern fiction, Butler's theory of

transgression offers a way of examining how such moments are implicated in the structure of the law and how they can be both implicated in that structure and provide a critique of it by rewriting its normative associations.

However, postmodern writers as well as critics tend to rely on the ecstatic model for their understanding of transgression. In fact, much of the criticism on Acker's work relies heavily on the conceptions of sexuality, gender identity, and transgression found in the works of Deleuze and Guattari and Kristeva. Acker's sexual violence, her use of explicitly sexual drawings, and her presentations of incestuous fathers and absent mothers, for example, have all been read through their works. Even Acker's own theory of the revolutionary potential of desire is "plagiarized" from Deleuze and Guattari; in Blood and Guts in High School, she repeats Deleuze and Guattari's claim about the revolutionary potential of desire, altered only slightly, in capital letters:

EVERY POSITION OF DESIRE, NO MATTER HOW SMALL, IS
CAPABLE OF PUTTING TO QUESTION THE ESTABLISHED
ORDER OF A SOCIETY; NOT THAT DESIRE IS ASOCIAL; ON
THE CONTRARY. BUT IT IS EXPLOSIVE; THERE IS NO
DESIRING MACHINE CAPABLE OF BEING ASSEMBLED
WITHOUT DEMOLISHING ENTIRE SOCIAL SECTIONS. (125)

In this way, Acker herself proclaims, loudly, her alliance with the work of Deleuze and Guattari and her belief in the "explosive" potential of desire to demolish the social realm. But, as I will illustrate in the next chapter, the ecstatic readings of

Acker's work place the revolutionary and subversive potential outside the text. And, to limit our readings of Acker's work to ecstatic models is to limit our understanding of the socio-political critiques in her works. Such readings locate revolutionary potential in the representation of transgressive moments, but they are not able to examine how these acts may, in fact, be connected with the very structures being transgressed. They promise liberation solely on the basis that the presentation of such transgressive versions of desire will explode all social constructions. Yet, if we return to the Freudian notion of repression, we can see that such moments might also be used to reinforce the very authority which is being challenged.

Such readings also fail to answer important questions raised by Acker's text. For example, an issue that has long been discussed in terms of Acker's work is the problem of dealing with the violence that is experienced by her female heroines. The fact that her characters are raped and violated repeatedly and find release only in death is disturbing to many readers and complicates attempts to read these events as ecstatic moments of liberation. Butler asks, "What kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?" (32). By looking at Acker's work only for its ecstatic transgression, we overlook the way that the work repeats the oedipal drama. And it is this repetition of the incest taboo, written as a lover's discourse and vividly illustrated, that both invokes and challenges this most basic of cultural taboos. By creating a parallel between the incestuous relationship of Janey and her father and other heterosexual relationships in the novel, Acker's text provides an example of a "subversive repetition" which denaturalizes the taboo and

exposes the connection between the incest taboo and the regulatory practice which institutes heterosexuality as a cultural norm. It is for this reason that I offer Butler's theory of subversion as a more satisfactory way of reading the work of Acker as well as other works of postmodern fiction. Although the provocative nature of ecstatic readings of these works is indisputable, they overlook key elements which complicate our understanding of these texts and their use of transgressive moments.

By providing a means to read fiction in terms of the way that it both implicates and critiques structures of power, Butler's theory of subversive repetition opens up new readings of the transgressive moments within postmodern fiction. In the chapters that follow, I will look at four postmodern novels: Kathy Acker's Blood and Guts in High School, Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow, J.G. Ballard's Crash, and Angela Carter's The Passion of New Eve. In addition to their authors' prominence as postmodern authors,¹⁶ these novels offer a variety of representations of transgression, as well as providing ideal sites for illustrating the diversity of ways in which using Butler's theories can provide insight into reading postmodern fiction. In the next chapter, I will look at how using Butler reveals the limitations of using an ecstatic model of transgression to read one of Acker's novels, Blood and Guts in High School. I begin with Acker's work because it is perhaps the best representation of the

¹⁶Although lists of postmodern fiction vary greatly, these writers, with the possible exception of Ballard, continue to appear time and again. Although Ballard's position as a postmodern writer may be less secure (perhaps due to the ambiguous acceptance of science fiction in academic circles), this novel represents an aspect of postmodern representations of desire (the car as cyborg erotic extension) so that its inclusion is essential.

difficulties faced by critics trying to explore the social/political critique in postmodern transgression using an ecstatic model of transgression. Chapter four illustrates how reading Gravity's Rainbow through Butler's theory of transgression offers a new way of reading the possibility for resistance in the novel. While chapters three and four focus primarily on the possibility of critique offered by the works of Acker and Pynchon, chapters five and six switch gears slightly and look at the possibilities for liberation offered by re-envisioning sexuality and desire. In chapter five, I look at the way Ballard's use of the erotization of the automobile provides for a new version of desire. And Angela Carter's The Passion of New Eve, in chapter six, provides, perhaps, the best example of the kind of critique that Butler is calling for in her works, Gender Trouble in particular. Although my approach to each of these writings will be slightly different, the benefit of applying a Butlerian theory of transgression as opposed to the ecstatic models normally applied is that for each of these novels it expands the readings of the texts and provides for new ways of dealing with crucial critical issues which have shadowed the reception of these novels.

CHAPTER THREE

"You're the first joy I knew": Incest and the Sanctioning of Gender Identity in Kathy Acker's Blood and Guts in High School

Janey depended on her father for everything and regarded her father as boyfriend, brother, sister, money, amusement, and father.

Kathy Acker, Blood and Guts in High School

When Kathy Acker's Blood and Guts in High School was published by Grove Press in 1984, its reception by reviewers was less than favorable; Cosmo Landesman, in Books and Bookmen, described it as "the gothic perversity of Lautremont [sic] mixed with the glory and gore of the Texas Chainsaw Massacre" (34), and Roy Hoffman, in his review of the novel for the New York Times Book Review, said that the "cruelty inflicted upon Janey and on women in general" makes the novel "abusive toward women" (16). However, more recent and more directly academic critiques have responded so positively to Acker's "perversity" and the "cruelty inflicted upon" women in her works that she has become one of the most recognized and celebrated writers of postmodern American fiction. The transgressive elements of Acker's work that originally shocked and disturbed readers are now read as powerful social critiques. In fact, Greg Lewis Peters, in "Dominance and Subversion: The Horizontal Sublime and Erotic Empowerment in the Works of Kathy Acker," describes Acker as "a tattooed feminist punk linguist who writes possibly the

most subversive novels in contemporary American fiction" (149). And she has been repeatedly described as the very embodiment of postmodern feminism.¹⁷ Thus, the disparity between the reviewers' responses to Acker as abusive towards women and the academic perception that her work is the embodiment of postmodern feminism reveals a crucial critical gap in the readings of her work and the readings of this novel in particular.

Colleen Kennedy, in "Simulating Sex and Imagining Mothers," makes this conflict clear when she examines Robert Siegle's analysis of Acker and Catherine Texier in Suburban Ambush: Downtown Writing and the Fiction of Insurgency. Siegle begins his chapter on Acker, "The Blood and Guts of Guerrilla Warfare," by recounting the responses of his students to his assignment of Blood and Guts in High School. As Kennedy points out, Siegle thus begins his chapter by excluding "certain

¹⁷Both Martina Sciolino, in "Kathy Acker and the Postmodern Subject of Feminism," and Karen Brennan, in "The Geography of Enunciation: Hysterical Pastiche in Kathy Acker's Fiction," see Acker as "exemplary for postmodern fiction" (Sciolino 437). However, I am simplifying this relationship above for the purposes of this argument, since Acker's work is seen not only as exemplifying postmodern feminism but also as embodying the conflicts between postmodernism and feminism. For instance, Sciolino points out that Acker's fictions are a kind of "performative" example of the conflicts between poststructuralist deconstructions of identity and the struggle for a "feminist subject" (438). She claims, "Acker's writing acts out the suppositions of poststructuralism and feminism while critiquing both in relationship to one another" (439). Similarly, Brennan, whose article I will discuss in more detail below in terms of her reading of this novel, claims that while Acker employs what Jameson calls "pastiche," she does so with the intent of exposing the limitations of its "gender neutral" assumptions: "As a writer who has chosen to write a postmodern text, to engage in 'pastiche' and all attendant 'neutrality' of such a practice, Acker's challenge is to unravel the very politics of gender that have, once again, silenced a feminine subjectivity" (250). Therefore, while I have simplified their positions for the sake of argument, these works, nevertheless, see Acker as not only exemplifying postmodern and poststructuralist positions but as revising these positions so that they have a feminist socio-political power.

voices," in this case the voices of those who might find the novel offensive (167).

She says,

he silences voices never fully assimilated into academic discourse and, equally important, voices that object to the pornographic representations. Reacting to a female student's comment, "If my mother saw what I was reading she'd die," Siegle responds: "[Acker's] work *does* offend those who serve unreflectively the patriarchal establishment that determines mother-daughter relations as, shall we say, problematic" (47). To find Acker offensive is "to serve *unreflectively*," to be an improper reader... (167)

Although, as Kennedy notes, Siegle believes that most critics "have not gotten very far beyond" the reactions of his students, I believe that, in fact, most current criticism on Acker's works tends to underplay the possible negative responses to her uses of graphic images and violence against women.¹⁸ However, Kennedy makes an important point when she claims that to write off such responses as merely "naive" or "unreflective" readings keeps us from properly exploring Acker's use of violence against women. She says that we must be willing to ask ourselves what this violence means. Does it really provide the liberation Acker's critics grant it? She parodies such readings, drawing attention to the violence committed against the female character in In Memoriam to Identity, when she says,

¹⁸Published in 1989, Siegle's text is one of the earliest pieces on Acker's work, and the critical response to her work has changed substantially since his book was published.

Witnessing the degradations of pornography will paradoxically restore humanity to women (and men)--or at least to proper readers.

Witnessing a woman having her vulva sliced with a knife seems a small price to pay to be redeemed from biochip-hood. (176)

However, according to ecstatic readings of the text, the "degradations of pornography" do restore "humanity" to women and men because transgressive desires are seen as having the power to undo repressive social and political structures. Such readings probably would declare that the horror inherent in such a graphic representation of violence against a woman is powerful because of its ability ultimately to transgress those social structures which deny women power.

Acker promotes ecstatic readings of her work by aligning herself with the work of Bataille, Deleuze and Guattari, and Kristeva in her writings and in interviews.¹⁹ And, as I mentioned at the end of chapter two, she plagiarizes Deleuze and Guattari in Blood and Guts in High School, claiming that desire has the power to demolish "ENTIRE SOCIAL SECTIONS" (Acker 125). Therefore, it is only logical that many critics would follow Acker's lead and use an ecstatic model to come to

¹⁹For instance, in an interview with R.U. Sirius, Acker claims "Bataille is cool" and goes on to explain how Bataille and his followers offer new (and better) models for what society should look like. In Hannibal Lecter, My Father, she says that reading Anti-Oedipus, as well as the works of Foucault, put a "whole new language" at her "disposal" for expressing what she had believed for a long time (10). And in an interview with Andrea Juno, she discusses how her own thinking corresponds with the ideas expressed by Kristeva in Powers of Horror: "in a way it's because you *don't* have power, but you're *looking* for power...I think this is a bit how art is created. Julia Kristeva has written a book, Powers of Horror, about this..." (Redding 289).

terms with the transgressive elements of her work.

Douglas Shields Dix's analysis, in "Kathy Acker's Don Quixote: Nomad Writing," is a good example of the application of an ecstatic theory of transgression to her work. Dix claims, first of all, that Acker's works exemplify Deleuze and Guattari's schizoid desire. That is, he claims that "Acker rejects standard conceptions of revolutionary transformation," opting instead for "reaching a point of excess where the intense becoming of her molecular organization breaks through, via a line of flight, to the outside" (57-58). Rather than discovering revolution in any group or joint form of resistance, Don Quixote must locate the site for subversion within her own body. Yet, as Dix points out, the end of the book would seem to indicate the failure of this attempt, "a failure of any transformative possibility" (61). Dix, however, claims this is not the case; although Don Quixote cannot "change. . . society itself," she can "by taking on herself the lines of flight necessary to her own becomings, her own process and movement" find a "form of social transformation" (61). Dix's reading is typical of ecstatic readings of Acker not just for its reliance on the work of Deleuze and Guattari for the terminology with which to describe her characters, but also because he finds the ending of the novel problematic in terms of its presentation of the potential for liberation in the text. The difficulty of explaining how Acker's characters are ultimately liberated despite their continuous degradations and, finally, their deaths has complicated even those readings which claim to find Acker's texts unquestionably liberatory. The solutions to this dilemma tend to read the text as a kind of "signpost" toward revolution and liberation, and they locate the

character's liberation outside of the text, in the response to the text itself. For instance, Arthur Redding in "Bruises, Roses: Masochism and the Writings of Kathy Acker," concludes his extensive look at the use of masochism in her writings, wherein he claims Acker uses masochism and violence "in a ruthless search for a potential freed of the strictures of conscribed identity," by stating that Acker fails to give readers a "glimpse of society" that is not "just disgust" because it "is still largely inexpressible" (283; 301). The text itself provides no new version of society, no vision of that freedom; yet, he claims

for all that, [it is] a triumphal failure, as it scorns all means--personal, political, literary--by which we might feebly acquiesce to the insipid and reactionary ideology of 'success.' It would be recidivist, after all this, to pass judgement upon Acker's strange and senseless questing. Acker is neither defeatist nor smug, but caught up in a ceaselessly productive cycle of self-mutilation that fully disrespects the limits of the self. (301)

Although he may find Acker's quest "strange and senseless," Redding finds it a powerful expression of resistance nonetheless. The violence in the text which remains a "cycle of self-mutilation" is productive for what it exposes about society and, in particular, what it exposes about the position of women within society, but as Redding points out, the results of this exposition do not lead to a successful liberation within

the text.²⁰

To some readers, Blood and Guts in High Schools offers a solution to this alienation and degradation of Acker's female characters not present in many of Acker's other works. Greg Lewis Peters, for example, claims that Janey finds an escape from alienation when she dies. In arguing for this, Peters borrows Patricia Yaeger's reading of Luce Irigaray and the concept of a "horizontal female sublime" to explain the satisfaction of Janey's desires.²¹ Peters views the closing pictographic sections, "The World" and "The Journey," as the representation of Janey's experience of the horizontal female sublime, which he reads as a moment of "empowerment" and as offering "the realization that a door has been opened and a new plane of existence

²⁰Another critic, Terry Brown, in "Longing to Long: Kathy Acker and the Politics of Pain," tries to locate some answer to the longing for love experienced by most of Acker's character in the texts, but she can find only a bitter and unresolved nostalgia that provides no answer to the "psychic pain" which haunts these characters. She, too, ultimately sees the longing in the text as unfulfilled. Acker's texts become instead a performance of

the crisis of female desire and subjectivity--that is, woman's otherness, her exclusion from narratives of masculine desire, such as the nostalgic story. Acker dramatizes that alienation by writing woman as subject into a traditionally male narrative, the story of the quest (171).

²¹Peters effectively explains the concept of the "horizontal sublime" using the death of Obi-Wan Kenobi from the movie Star Wars. He says, "Kenobi turns off his saber and submits to the dominant Darth Vader, letting his physical boundary be violated unto death--and he is suddenly everywhere within the fabric of the universe" (154). Thus, for Peters, once Janey allows her body to be "violated unto death," she escapes the boundaries which have made her search for love and self impossible; she is released into the universe at large. This allows the "passage of Janey's soul into the continuum" (154). However, while it is easy to understand how Obi-Wan Kenobi's power increases when he allows himself to be killed, it is not as clear how this provides for a solution to the problematic relationship women have to language and the patriarchy that Peters is addressing in his essay. Perhaps, like Luke, we are to be guided by the disembodied voice of Janey who now exists beyond not only the text but the physical world.

is within reach" (154). Brennan refers to these same pictures as "either the voice of Acker, who survives her own protagonist, or the voice of Janey from beyond the grave, or both at once" (265). But what kind of voice does Janey's release from life and its extreme limitations provide? If, as much of the criticism acknowledges, Acker is struggling with the deep embeddedness of the patriarchy in language and the difficulty of speaking from within a "male world"--as Don Quixote says, she has "NO SPEECH OF HER OWN" and "ALL SHE COULD DO WAS READ MALE TEXTS WHICH WEREN'T HERS"--then how does this voice, even from beyond the grave, escape the limitations of language in order to offer its vision of a new society (39)? Such readings echo feminist conceptions of a distinctly feminist space, a wild zone, a moment beyond our current time and society. However, as Butler claims, we can never really escape from the moment in which we live, and such escapes, therefore, will always fail to fulfill the liberation that they promise. Where, then, does the socio-political critique of Acker's text lie? Is there anything within the text that offers a useful site from which to critique those structures of society that Acker and those who write on her work feel exist in her work? Perhaps, the best way to discover and explore the socio-political critique of the text is to look in more depth at the assumptions made by ecstatic critics, to explore the elements that have tended to be glossed over when desire is assumed in and of itself to be revolutionary. And in Blood and Guts in High School, perhaps, the least examined but most important

element of the text is the violation of the incest taboo.²² Ecstatic readings of the text read this violation of the incest taboo as liberatory because it represents a transgression of a central cultural taboo; however, as I will illustrate below, ecstatic readings overlook the way Acker exposes the interconnectedness between the incest taboo and the system of gender positions it sanctions. Violating the incest taboo does not in and of itself disrupt gender positions, but I will claim that this nonetheless is the place where the socio-political critique of the text can be located--not because violating the incest taboo represents a transgressive desire that has the power to dismantle all social structures but, instead, because the novel reveals that these structures remain intact despite the transgression of one of the foundational taboos, a taboo that supposedly sanctions gender positions within these same social structures.

Kathleen Hulley, in "Transgressing Genre: Kathy Acker's Intertext," claims that Acker exposes the social constructions "embedded" in the incest taboo and that this exposure has the power to transform conventions:

punk artist Kathy Acker works to undo and make visible the intricate buttoning of incest and politics. . . in her undoing, she explicitly transforms current conventions of feminist and political content by

²²By least examined, I do not mean to imply that no one looks at this issue; on the contrary, almost every one mentions it as central, but few of Acker's critics examine this relationship in depth. Instead, they tend, as I will discuss briefly below, merely to accept its transgressive power and then to proceed with their readings based on this assumption. While my reading of the incest taboo will also grant it a kind of subversive potential, I feel the complexity of Acker's use of this incest taboo and its central position in this novel make it crucial that we explore it more fully before granting it the power to "undo social systems."

articulating the ways in which sexuality and the contradictory liberation moments of our time are predicated on a social construction whose political unconscious is embedded in textually sanctioned father/daughter incest. (171-72)

Hulley is correct that Acker's text reveals the oppressive social/power structures that are constructed by the incest taboo, but it is important to examine how exposing this social construction provides a liberation from those structures. Hulley's critique, like many ecstatic readings of Acker, argues that the presentation of transgressive desire, the staging of "every posture of political and sexual abjection through images of our darkest most terrorizing 'other,'" has the power to undo social structures (178-79).²³ However, Hulley, like many of Acker's critics, does not examine this assumption; she does not look at how the incest in the text is presented, nor does she explore how it is that this presentation comes to both expose and "undo social structures." But the possibility for critique lies within that "intricate buttoning" between incest and politics that is exposed in Blood and Guts in High School, and in order to understand this critique, it is important to look closely at the way the incest taboo functions in the text and how its presentation becomes the site for such a critique. While I agree with Hulley's basic claims, I feel that she, like those offering the ecstatic readings discussed above, is too quick to grant the violation of the incest taboo a kind of revolutionary essence. In order to come to terms adequately with the kind of critique

²³Hulley claims Acker is influenced by the "perverse path" of such writers of the ecstatic as de Sade, Bataille, Kristeva, and Genet (178).

offered by Acker, we must try to address those "certain voices" Kennedy refers to who might find the work offensive. In "Postmodern Women Novelists Review Victorian Male Masochism," Carol Siegel says of Acker's work that she dwells

on what is usually suppressed in artistic depictions of sadomasochism, physical realities like infected sores and psychic realities like the despair accompanying the certainty that "there's no possibility that anyone'll love you anymore or that love matters. . ." (9).²⁴

Acker dwells on these physical realities, but many of the readings of her work do not. In the following reading of the text, I will explore these physical and psychic realities that while not suppressed by Acker have been too often suppressed by ecstatic readings of her work.

Acker, herself, grants the physical presence of the body a powerful role; in 1989, she said, "The body does not lie. Language, if it is not propaganda or media blab, is the body; with such language lies are not possible" ("A Few Notes. . ." 35).²⁵ And in Don Quixote, the main character claims that educational systems

²⁴Carol Siegel is referring specifically to what happens in Acker's novel Great Expectations; however, the themes and images she refers to can be found in all of Acker's work to date.

²⁵In this quote, Acker recognizes the connection between the body and language. However, she might seem to be granting the body a power that language does not have; the power to somehow speak the truth. Personally, I do not grant the body that degree of power; however, its representation, its materiality in a text, and in this novel in particular, does reveal important socio-political insights. Therefore, I am not advocating that we look to the body as a source for any kind of unquestionable truth or essentialist power, but instead that we look at the representation of Janey's body in the text for the insight it offers us about her role in society and the way that body's construction within culture effects the possibility for liberation in the text.

obscure knowledge, and "[s]ince these educators train the mind rather than the body, we can start with the physical body, the place of shitting, eating, etc., to break through our opinions or false education" (166). However, when we look at Acker's text, it is the body that we most often overlook, that which we most want to avoid seeing. While the violation of the female body is commonplace in Acker's fiction, the discussions of the violent treatment of actual bodies in the texts tend to turn the body into a metaphor. Turning bodies into metaphors means not having to deal with the problem of discovering liberation in the graphic violations of Acker's female characters; it makes it easier to believe in such liberation. There is a comfortable critical distance to be gained by dealing thus with this violence, as Robert Siegle, in "A Sailor's Life in Empire of the Senseless," does when he refers to one such scene as "Acker's recurrent drama of rape and incest as the primal site of patriarchal discipline" (71). Rather than looking in any detail at such scenes, critics tend to gloss over them in a manner that reduces their disturbing impact to mere theme. Rape and incest are accepted as such common themes in her work that their symbolization, as sites where the patriarchy is both located and challenged, itself goes unchallenged and unexplored. Many ecstatic readings of the text assume that rape and incest symbolize a transgressive liberation, and, therefore, they end up reducing these themes to an abstraction which goes unchallenged and unquestioned.²⁶ However, by downplaying

²⁶As I will illustrate below, this association of incest and rape with liberation becomes problematic for many ecstatic readings of the text. Although there are a number of interesting connections that might be explored between Kristeva or Deleuze and Guattari and the work of Acker, the tendency of such readings to begin with the assumption that such moments are liberatory rather than exploring how they are (or

the violent nature of this conflict, critics strip such scenes of their critical power. For instance, Hulley realizes that Acker's work presents us with an "abject and terrifying realm of desire so insatiable that its invasions and betrayals reveal themselves as a frantic reconstruction of a fictional self that returns us only to the scene of our own obliteration" (175). Yet, she says that Acker's use of the "pathetic body" is a strategy which is "purely linguistic, a voiding of any textual ground where bourgeois identity might construct itself" (174-75). While we may think of fictional bodies as "purely linguistic," to do so is to avoid the most interesting and provocative questions raised by Acker's text. What is the effect of using graphic representations of the repeated violation of the female body? What kind of critique is present in the disturbing pictures and captions that confront and often offend/embarrass/horrify readers of the text? What is Acker saying about desire and the female body?

At the end of the first volume of his The History of Sexuality, Foucault indicates that the place for resistance, for a "counterattack" against the association of power and sex is to be found in bodies and pleasure:

It is the agency of sex that we must break away from, if we aim-- through a tactical reversal of the various mechanisms of sexuality--to counter the grips of power with claims of bodies, pleasures and knowledge, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance. The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality

are not) liberatory has meant that most of these connections have yet to be adequately explored and explicated.

ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasure. (157).

Acker's text, however, shows how difficult it is to define or discover pleasure for the female body, since this body is heavily implicated in the oppressive patriarchal structure. Rosalind Coward says that women need to question the conception of pleasure, since in pornography, "the pleasure seems conditional on feeling power to use women's bodies" (135). That such pleasure, even for women, is implicated in a sexual dynamic which makes any attempt to find a way of expressing desire complicitous with the same structures that it seeks to "counterattack" is a central argument in discussions of Acker, as well as in discussions of pornography and female sexuality. Sheila Jeffrey's position is typical; she claims that since desire is "eroticized power difference," there is "no word available" to express positive feelings about sexuality for women (471). In the context of feminist discussions of pornography, Acker's presentation of the body of Janey illustrates the difficulty of defining female pleasure or any form of counterattack to the power relationships established through the incest taboo and heterosexual matrix. Acker's use of the material body of Janey in the text thus forces the reader to confront the difficulty of trying to discover liberation in the transgression of the incest taboo because it is a constant reminder to readers of the violence and pain Janey experiences as a result of this same transgression.

And Acker forces us to confront the physical body in Blood and Guts in High School whether we want to or not. The text is full of drawings of the body, graphic representations of the sexual nature of the bodies of Janey and her father. These

pictures serve to increase the "shock-value" of the text. Larry McCaffery claims Acker's use, in all her novels, of shock value is meant to "force a confrontation between readers and *all* conventions (literary and otherwise), to shock them out of complacent acceptance of hierarchies, received traditions and meanings, stable identities" (216). These pictures do assuredly provoke the readers and force such a confrontation. Robert Siegle, in Suburban Ambush, recounts a typical student response to the text: "'I never thought I was a prude until I opened this book. I was reading it outside between classes and I found myself holding the book half-closed so the people sitting around me wouldn't see the illustrations'" (47). The illustrations confirm Janey's violation while violating the safety of the position of even the most hardened reader of postmodern fiction. They graphically echo Janey's experiences with her father and illustrate that the female body is a problematic site for representing a purely liberatory, transgressive desire.

However, most of the pictures in the opening scene are not of Janey but of her father, and they are not of her whole father but, instead, are pictures of a male body that emphasize the penis, which is large and featured prominently in many of the pictures.²⁷ Other pictures are focused primarily on the father's organ in various states of arousal and nonarousal. When Janey is featured, it is usually as a vagina, completely disconnected from any body and open. The picture on page 19 is a good

²⁷Karen Brennan sees this decapitation of the father in the illustrations as a possible castration; however, the prominence of the penises in the picture calls this possibility into question. By picturing the father without a head, the picture draws attention to his penis as a representation of his strength and power. It is through his sexual organs that he exerts his power over Janey.

example; it is a picture of an open vagina, attached to no body and with a caption that reads "My red cunt ugh." This picture reflects the complicated condition of Janey's desire; she wants to have sex with her father because it is the only way that she has of experiencing love, of trying to regain a paternal love that she feels is slipping away, but this experience is painful because it is mediated through a sexual organ that is diseased and, therefore, sexual contact is excruciatingly painful for her. Acker is playing here with the association of the vagina with an open wound, since this is literally the case with Janey. By picturing Janey in terms of an open, and wounded, vagina, Acker makes clear that Janey is caught in the terrible bind of having to discover love through a body that is in pain, a body which cannot experience the only thing she seeks, love.

Several pages later, another illustration actually shows Janey's body. In this picture, Janey and her father are both included, but he is represented both as a body (again with a prominent penis and no head) and as a second penis which is positioned against Janey's breast. Both of the penises in this picture illustrate how small Janey is in comparison with the body of the father. The representation of her body in this picture is childlike in size, although the breasts are developed and Janey has hair under her arms, which would seem to indicate puberty at least. This discrepancy between the sexual development of the character and her child-like size mirrors the conflict in age represented by the voice and character descriptions, that I will discuss in more detail below. The penis resting on Janey is grossly disproportionate when compared with Janey's body. The caption, "cause she wanted to fuck love more than

she felt pain," again reminds the reader that Janey's sex with her father is not pleasurable but something which she does despite great pain because she believes that it is the only way to achieve the love she desires (22). These images, then, serve as vivid reminders of the physical bodies in the text; they illustrate that the father's penis is an instrument of power, and the captions make the reader confront the suffering that Janey endures in order to discover love. Further, the graphic captions draw attention to the lack of all physical satisfaction for Janey in this relationship. This is a crucial element for understanding the way that transgressive desire is intertwined with the structures of power, the patriarchy, in the text. The physical violation of the incest taboo does not open a new realm of desire but, rather, seems to repeat the patterns of heterosexuality that the Oedipus complex sanctions. Acker does not present the incest between Janey and her father as an ecstatic moment that has the power to rupture boundaries. Instead, she presents incest as an ordinary, even mundane event. Her presentation of incest in such a non-ecstatic manner means that the transgression in the text becomes a site for exploring rather than exploding the structures of power, and Janey's body can be read not as a site that destroys boundaries but as a site that reveals them.

By calling attention to the materiality of the bodies involved in the transgression of the incest taboo, Acker thus complicates any attempt to read this text as liberatory.²⁸ Acker does expose the power structures embedded in the incest

²⁸Since all of Acker's texts feature similarly graphic representations of the violation of women, through rape and incest, in particular, it is crucial that any attempt to come to terms with the liberatory or subversive nature of Acker's work consider what happens

taboo, as Hulley claims, but this exposure by itself does not offer liberation from those structures. In fact, what is exposed is that within a system constructed by the patriarchy, Janey is trapped. Janey looks for love, but she can only express this desire through a body that is already marked by a patriarchal system in ways that prohibit her from escaping from its prison. Although Janey and her father have violated the incest taboo, this structure is not ruptured, destroyed, or even overturned by this violation, since their relationship retains the power structures that the taboo sanctions despite its transgression. The dynamic of the oedipal structure not only remains but becomes a key component of the dialogue in the text. But, as I will discuss below, it is by looking at the way these structures remain intact despite this transgression, rather than the way they might be "exploded," that the subversive possibilities of the text can be recognized. By "doing" rather than undoing the oedipalization of our culture, the violation of the incest taboo reveals the artificiality of that taboo and demystifies its role in the sanctioning of distinct gender identities and heterosexuality. Yet, we have to confront what we want to hold "half-closed" about the book in order to understand how Acker does this. Naomi Jacobs claims that Acker makes visible "[w]hat has always been there" through a "process of selective, disruptive repetition" (53). It is through the repetition of the incest taboo that Acker reveals that "what has always been there," at the heart of cultural taboos, is a structure that represses women. By revealing that even the violation of that taboo does not disrupt these structures supposedly founded upon the incest taboo, Acker

to female bodies in the text.

performs what Butler calls a "subversive repetition"; she reveals that "naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality" are merely fictions that continue to be reiterated in order to maintain current structures of socio-political power. Acker makes this point by illustrating the parallels between father/daughter incest in the text and all heterosexual relationships, and she thus challenges the very core of the incest taboo and the oedipal structure itself.

Acker creates a parallel between father/daughter incest and all heterosexual relationships by using the language of a lover's discourse, a discourse of one lover leaving another, to portray the relationship between Janey and her father. Acker tells us in the opening section, "Parents Stink," that "Janey Smith was ten years old" and completely dependent on her father. As the opening quote illustrates, Janey is without a mother, and her father has come to represent every familial position that Janey needs. Yet, the opening dialogue between Janey and her father creates a picture of their relationship that makes it easy to deny both Janey's age and her vulnerability. That is, rather than giving us a picture of a frightened, violated child, Acker's use of a lover's discourse creates a vision of their relationship that makes Janey look like a pathetic, desperate lover who will go to any lengths to hold on to a lover who she knows is already emotionally distancing himself from her:

Janey: You're going to leave me. (*She doesn't know why she is saying this.*)

Father: (*dumbfounded, but not denying it*): Sally and I just slept together for the first time. How can I know anything?

Janey (*in amazement. She didn't believe what she had been saying was true. It was only out of petulance*): You ARE going to leave me. Oh no. No. That can't be.

Father (*also stunned*): I never thought I was going to leave you. I was just fucking. (7)

Janey here speaks with the voice of an adult, the voice of a woman who is afraid, angry, and unable to let go of the man she loves. She begs him not to leave; she apologizes for "pushing him" on the subject. She even has sex with him after he returns home from being with Sally, despite the physical pain it causes her because her sexual organs are infected; the picture on page 19, discussed above, serves to reinforce the pain that is associated with her sexual organ. The stark contrast between what Acker tells the readers about Janey and the voice that speaks in the opening section of the novel clouds the oedipal scene being enacted. In this opening dialogue, Acker draws on a familiar scene, two lovers parting, with one lover unprepared to face this truth that is even as it becomes more and more apparent. Janey tries to take back the words she has spoken in anger because once they have been spoken the reality that her father no longer wants her becomes harder to deny, both for Janey and her father:

Janey. . . (*Realizes she might be flying off the handle and creating the situation. Wants to hear his creation for a minute. Shivers with fear when she asks this.*) Are you madly in love with her?

Father (*thinking. Confusion's beginning*): I don't know.

Janey: I'm not crazy (*Realizing he's madly in love with the other woman.*) I don't mean to act like this. (*Realizing more and more how madly in love he is...*) (7)

Yet, while the voice of Janey makes it easier to envision this relationship as between Janey and a lover, only a metaphoric father, Acker's use of a lover's discourse serves both to hide and vividly reveal the desperate need of a child who fears she is losing her father's love and, in this case, a child who has no one except her father from whom to receive love. From the second paragraph of the text, we have known that Janey is only ten years old, but the use of a lover's discourse distances readers from the incestuous nature of Janey's relationship with her father. It blinds readers to the nature of their relationship while simultaneously assuring that the nature of the relationship as familial is an ever present fact. The dialogue spoken may sound like that of two lovers parting, but the lines of dialogue identify the familial bond; when he speaks, his role is reiterated: "Father." This dialogue is not, then, merely a recounting of the bitter realization that a love affair is ending but a graphic expression of one of the primary desires that found our social culture: the forbidden desire of a child for a parent.

Karen Brennan, in "The Geography of Enunciation: Hysterical Pastiche in Kathy Acker's Fiction," offers the most extended reading of this relationship. Brennan claims that the father represents a kind of portrait of Janey's "split self" and that "the configurations of father and daughter are hopelessly entangled, mirroring each other's splits, castrations, and hysteria to the point at which locating a difference

between them is difficult indeed" (256). This confusion of the positions of Janey and her father allows Brennan to rewrite their positions within the oedipal structure.

According to Brennan, the drawings in the text (in particular the first picture which presents a pair of headless bodies, each wearing a t-shirt and no pants, one with an erect penis and the other penis pointed down) revise the oedipal positioning of the characters:

Such specularization of the father transforms the daughter into a pornographer and the phallic father into a sex object, a consumable product. Feminized, the father's penis reflects the daughter's confused subjectivity, a subjectivity she has, in turn, borrowed (by assuming the phallus) from hegemonic, capitalist discourse. (246)

Brennan believes that the "scenes of the family drama," of the oedipal drama played out in this opening dialogue, position Janey "as the overbearing mother and the father as the daughter/son on the threshold of the Oedipal stage" (247-48). She bases this reversal of roles on the comments made by Bill, Janey's father's friend and her former lover, who psychoanalyzes the situation and decides that Janey has "dominated [her father's] life since [her] mother died and now [her father] hates [her]" (Acker 11). He sees her father's rejection as a natural consequence of this dynamic, just a familiar part of the oedipal development: "He has to hate you because he has to reject you. He has to find out who he is" (11). While Brennan is critical of Bill, whom she describes as a pedophile, her understanding of the oedipal roles of the characters, nonetheless, corresponds to his own.

Brennan claims that this reversal of roles creates a multiplicity of positions that disrupt the family and oedipal structure. She uses Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of the "classical family structure," which "preserves its unity by the way it inscribes all the instability of the world into the family system," to help explain how this disruption serves a political end (258). She claims,

By destabilizing identities and, especially, family roles, Acker dissolves this drama that maintains the family. Such dissolution reverberates everywhere, collapsing the distinction between inside/outside (that is, the distinction between the family and the world, public and private realms), and exposes, therefore, the fiction of the family unity. (258-59).

While I agree with Brennan that the socio-political critique in the text comes from the destabilization of identities, I believe that this destabilization comes not from a reversal of the oedipal drama but from the way that alterations of the typical oedipal relationships reveal the limitations of the oedipal drama and explore its dominance as a key taboo in our culture. To accept Bill's interpretation of the oedipal relationship of Janey and her father is to read the text on the level of a lover's discourse, since Bill speaks from the adult perspective which covers over the incestuous relationship between Janey and her father. The socio-political, and psychoanalytical, critique of the novel comes not in overturning the oedipal structure of this opening scene but in reading the scene through this structure and exploring the way Acker's use of a lover's discourse allows us to reexamine the role of the oedipal drama in constructing

not just the family but sexuality as well.

Only a page after Bill gives his analysis of Janey and her father's situation, Father repeats his words, telling Janey,

You've completely dominated my life, Janey, for the last nine years
and I no longer know who's you and who's me. I have to be alone.

You've been alone for a while, you know that need: I have to find out
who I am. (12)

Read through a lover's discourse, or through the reversal of oedipal positions suggested by Bill (and Brennan), this scene is merely a restatement of Father's need to separate from the maternal figure, Janey, in order to establish his own identity. But, if we do not reverse these positions and revise the familial relationship between Father and Janey, then this scene takes on a new dimension. Although the graphic illustrations in the text are often considered its most shocking aspect, the most disturbing moments lie hidden, crouched in a lover's discourse, analyzed into harmlessness and even erased by the too quick attempts to read the overall critique of patriarchy in the book. The ten-year-old Janey has dominated her father's life for nine years because she is a child and her mother is dead. The search for his own identity makes her father long to be free from this responsibility, but behind Janey's voice of a desperate lover is the very basic need of a child for the love and security assumed to be provided by a parent. As a part of her book report on The Scarlet Letter, Janey says, "My father told me the day after he tried to rape me that security is the most important thing in the world. I told him sex is the most important thing in

the world..." (67). For Janey, sex has come to mean everything because it represents the love of her father. Security and sex are equally interchangeable, equally unattainable. To reverse the oedipal roles of Janey and her father is to deny this moment its power. If Janey occupies the position of the mother from whom the child (in this case "Father") must separate, then her father must make this break in order to complete his sexual development. However, without such a reversing of roles not only is Janey denied the opportunity to discover her own sexual maturity, but she is also denied any kind of pleasure, or even security, through the expression of her desire. In addition, the description of what is happening in their relationship becomes a kind of parodic moment when Father adopts the terms of oedipal development in order to justify his own position. He imagines their positions to be reversed because that allows his desires to be reasonable, and normal, and Janey's expectations to be abnormal and unreasonable.

Acker plays with the oedipal structure by covering over what is apparent, creating a contrast between what would be considered a normal expectation in a child and what is an unfair, and even obsessive, expectation in an adult lover. For instance, Janey's love and desire for her father is primary; it is the defining relationship in her life. She tells him, "I love you. I adore you. When I first met you, it's as if a light turned on for me. You're the first joy I knew. Don't you understand?" (9). In the Oedipus complex, this is normal; Janey's first identification, particularly since her mother is dead, should be her father. Acker reverses the usual gender positions of the Freudian conception of the Oedipal complex and transgresses

its taboo by allowing Janey and her father to violate the boundaries that are thought to establish normal (hetero)sexuality. However, Acker reveals that the violation of the incest taboo does not, in fact, alter the position of the players in this drama but, rather, only reiterates the same loss of the love of the primary object of desire. Janey's desire for her father is manifested in an actual physical relationship, but the loss that accompanies the Oedipus complex remains, since Janey's demands on her father that he love her are not met. Their physical relationship does not guarantee his love, and, in fact, only makes him tire of her. He abandons her by sending her to America, where she continues to search for some kind of fulfillment of the desire to be loved that her relationship with her father represents. In America, she tries to find some kind of substitution for what has been lost: "Daddy no longer loved me. That was it. I was desperate to find the love he had taken away from me" (31). But that substitution turns out only to be a reenactment of her failed relationship with her father. Here again, Acker is not overturning the terms of the incest taboo but is instead relying heavily upon them, since the element of loss is a crucial component of this dynamic.

Butler, in Gender Trouble, claims that for Freud

[this] process of internalizing lost loves becomes pertinent to gender formation when we realize that the incest taboo, among other functions, initiates a loss of a love-object for the ego and that this ego recuperates from this loss through the internalization of the tabooed object of desire. (58)

While Janey and her father have violated the incest taboo, Janey's gender formation is still constructed on the same experience of loss, since the physical relationship with her father does nothing to remedy her desire for the other. Her desire to be loved by her father remains unfulfilled, and, therefore, she must search for replacements for his love, replacements that will also fail to satisfy, and that also must be accessed through her body, no matter what physical pain such an attempt to discover love might cause.

Her relationship with Mr. Linker, the man who holds her prisoner and trains her to be the perfect "whore," parallels that of her relationship with her father. She tries to obtain from him the love that her father has denied her; however, this relationship is no more successful than the first since Mr. Linker's interest in Janey is in her marketable value as a sex slave. Janey has internalized an other who finds her unworthy of love, so she continues to seek what she thinks she neither deserves nor will find. Butler says, "[i]n cases in which an ambivalent relationship is severed through loss, that ambivalence becomes internalized as a self-critical or self-debasing disposition in which the role of the other is now occupied and directed by the ego itself" (58). Janey tries to discover love but instead finds only "fucking," physical relationships that end up leaving her sick, pregnant, and alone. Yet, "fucking" is all the love she has ever known; the physical act, that nowhere in the novel is satisfying or pleasurable, is equated with love for Janey: "she didn't tell [her father] it hurt badly there, too, because she wanted to fuck love more than she felt pain" (21). By having Janey repeat the pattern of internalizing the lost "tabooed object of desire"

even though the incest taboo is violated, Acker reveals the artificiality of this taboo and the way that the gender formations which are at the heart of this taboo are constructed by society rather than natural, and thus unchangeable, forces.

For Janey, all relationships represent the same kind of prison she experienced with her father; she is trapped by her need to experience love, but that love can only be sought through her body, and while she offers her body to those she loves (actually, she offers her body to everyone, even rapists, because any living being may offer the potential to be loved), this body, for her, is never the site of any real love or satisfaction.

Yet, by exploring this trap, we can see how Acker's text critiques the way that the incest taboo sanctions a system of gender positions that allows this violence against the feminine position to continue by revealing that these codes serve the interest of patriarchal power, as well as the heterosexual matrix, as Butler points out in Gender Trouble. She claims:

The taboo against incest and, implicitly, against homosexuality is a repressive injunction which presumes an original desire localized in the notion of 'dispositions,' which suffers a repression of an originally homosexual directionality and produces the displaced phenomenon of heterosexual desire...Thus, the repressive law effectively produces heterosexuality, and acts not merely as a negative or exclusionary code, but as a sanction and, most pertinently, as a law of discourse, distinguishing the speakable from the unspeakable (delimiting and

constructing the domain of the unspeakable), the legitimate from the illegitimate. (65)

By constructing this domain of the unspeakable, the incest taboo founds heterosexuality and founds gender identity for the individual. However, in Blood and Guts in High School, Acker speaks the unspeakable; the oedipal desire is fulfilled. The death of one parent and the freedom to sleep with the other is achieved. However, by speaking the unspeakable, Acker does not provide readers with an artistic rendering of a transgressive desire that might allow for a Freudian release. Acker's focus on the physical and psychic reality makes the reading of this text as a kind of performative release of tabooed desire which can then be repressed difficult if not impossible. There is no pleasure in this violation of the incest taboo, and rather than being punished for this violation, the main character is "punished" by not being able to continue the relationship.

Acker thus allows the confusion of sex and love to illustrate that the prohibition against incest does not, in fact, hold the key to successful gender identity. The problem for Janey is that her gender identity is all too clear. Her position as a woman in a patriarchal world means that she is always going to be unable to find what it is that she seeks: love. She identifies herself with Hester Prynne, a woman she sees as "wild" because she sought sexual freedom but who found that society would not allow her that freedom. Janey claims that like Hester, she "wanted to be a good girl for her father," but the only way to be good is to be a "good dead girl" (67). There is no room in society for those who do not conform, and even though

Janey seeks the help of Genet, she discovers that as a woman death is her only possible escape.²⁹ She says,

Everything that is this world stinks... I just absolutely know right now and for ever love's not going to come along, so I might as well die. I don't want to commit suicide anymore, like I used to; I want to go through death. (134)

Janey wants to go "through death" because she cannot find any satisfaction, any love; she is trying to recover the lost love, the ideal of perfection, which is her relationship with her father. Yet, for the readers, it is hard to see how this relationship would serve her much better, since she found no pleasure there.

It is easy to see why readings of this novel have difficulty in explaining the liberatory potential when Janey's existence is so hopeless throughout the novel. She is continually abused and violated by the men in her life. She is looking for someone to replace her father, and the irony of the novel is that a repetition of that relationship is all she finds. Every man in the text treats her as her father does. Although Genet does not have sex with her, he demands she be completely devoted to him, while simultaneously punishing her for that devotion. However, the degradation of Janey in the body of the novel makes looking for a solution in the last sections of the novel,

²⁹Genet symbolizes artistic endeavors and a kind of productive degradation, but as Janey quickly figures out, he doesn't have what it takes to be a woman. The degradation of a woman's everyday experience would be too much for Genet. Janey says, "Genet doesn't know how to be a woman. He thinks all he has to do is slobber. He has to do more. He has to get down on his knees and crawl mentally every minute of the day" (130).

in some kind of afterlife that promises an escape, problematic. If the structure of society is such that Janey will always be repeating relationships in which her only position is that of slave or child, desiring love but never finding it, then while death may provide an escape, it does not alter the socio-political structures that make a death from cancer the only kind of answer open to Janey.

However, while the potential of liberation looks bleak even outside the novel, the critique of the incest taboo as a structuring principle of the heterosexual matrix does at least offer some possibility for subversion of current gender positions. By presenting the oedipal drama as between a daughter and father and then having the characters actually violate the incest taboo, Acker is able to show that the incest taboo does not found gender identity or that even when it is violated it continues to found the same gender positions. The power structure that is sanctioned by such taboos remains intact even when those taboos are violated. The taboo is not exploded or overturned merely by being violated, but the violation does serve to expose the taboo as mere construct, as a principle that allows for the construction of gender identity to serve the interests of patriarchal power. Therefore, while the violation of the incest taboo and the continued sexual violations of Janey throughout the text are subversive, they are not subversive because of their power to undo social constructs; they are not subversive because they represent some understanding of desire as a revolutionary force. Instead, the transgressive desire in the text is subversive because it exposes that such desires are manufactured to maintain power structures: "desire is manufactured and forbidden as a ritual symbolic gesture whereby the juridical model

exercises and consolidates its power" (Butler, Gender Trouble 76). Such desire reveals the artificiality of such structures, and, thus, while the character is unable to escape from the limitations imposed upon her by virtue of her gender, the text reveals that those boundaries are themselves artificial constructs. That is, the consolidation of power is exposed by Acker's presentation of the violation of the incest taboo, which helps to illustrate that even when the most primary of these taboos is violated, the power structure remains intact. Acker thus may not offer a new vision of the world, but she provides her readers with a strong critique of a central taboo and the way that taboo sanctions a system of gender positions wherein the feminine position is denied power and left to seek satisfaction in a world where none can be granted.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Beyond [the] simple steel erection": The Rocket as Lesbian Phallus in Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow

It began when Weissman brought him to Europe: a discovery that love, among these men, once past the simple feel and orgasming of it, had to do with masculine technologies, with contracts, with winning and losing. Demanded in his own case, that he enter the service of the Rocket. . . Beyond simple steel erection, the Rocket was an entire system *won away* from the feminine darkness, held against the entropies of lovable but scatterbrained Mother Nature: that was the first thing he was obliged by Weismann to learn, his first step toward citizenship in the Zone. He was led to believe that by understanding the Rocket, he would come to understand truly his manhood. . .
Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow

When it was published in 1973, Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow both fascinated and confounded readers. George Levine, in his review of Gravity's Rainbow for the Partisan Review, declared Pynchon "the most important American novelist now writing" but nonetheless found the novel "exceptionally difficult" and claimed the mark for measuring "intellectual machismo these days is the number of pages" of the novel a person had read (178). Early discussions of the novel often emphasize its difficult nature, almost as a cautionary note, prior to journeying into a discussion of its themes. In fact, in the 1976 collection Mindful Pleasures, David Leverenz structures his essay "On Trying to Read Gravity's Rainbow" by recounting the process of overcoming the problematic experience of reading the novel. His

reaction echoes that of many readers when he describes his initial experience reading Gravity's Rainbow:

Like most academics interested in contemporary literature, I eagerly bought Gravity's Rainbow. But the first twenty pages cooled my interest from curiosity to baffled boredom. By page fifty I had put the book down, and during the rest of the summer I haphazardly skimmed through it, looking for funny limericks or quotable lines. . . . The sequences of words and paragraphs made no sense to me, seemed in no special order, accrued no momentum. (229)

Yet, by the end of the article, Leverenz, while critical of Pynchon's "anti-organizational bias" and "hostility to the white male Establishment," comes to believe that the novel "make[s] sense" (242). But what kind of sense the novel makes is still very much in contention. Describing the difficulty of Gravity's Rainbow in contrast to the complexity of V in his 1976 essay, F. S. Schwarzbach points to a question whose ambiguous tone gets to the heart of much of the criticism of the novel: "Sooner or later, one must ask what the point of all this nonsense is" (60). Without the intonations of a speaker, this question has a dual meaning. On the one hand, it expresses the frustration of readers of the novel who find it silly, even incomprehensible, but, on the other, it is a summary of exactly what readers of the novel have been attempting to do for the more than twenty years since its publication--trying to get at the meaning of the novel's bizarre characters and plots, trying to find the "point" of the novel by discovering the meaning of such "nonsense"

as the story of Byron the Bulb, the adventures of Rocketman, the stunning, rippling sexual effect of the sado-masochistic film Alpdrucken, or even the connection between Slothrop's erections and the flight of the V-2 rocket. A large percentage of the body of Pynchon criticism is comprised of attempts to explain the historical, cultural, scientific, and/or technological inspirations for these often "nonsensical" details from the novel.³⁰

However, while many contemporary critics of Pynchon are still trying to "make sense" of the details of the novel, there has been increasing interest in exploring the political and social meanings of the text. Questions about the kind of political vision provided by the novel and whether or not the novel offers any possible challenge to the structures of power are foregrounded in much contemporary Pynchon criticism. From the first, because it is at the heart of his earliest works, the concept of entropy has been emphasized in readings of Pynchon's works. Yet, despite the prominence of this concept in readings of Pynchon, his work has not been aligned with critical perspectives, such as those expressed by the Krokors and Cook in their articulations of postmodern excremental culture, that tout the death of the social. There remains in Pynchon criticism a sense that the author and his work offer resistance to the kind of "doom and despair" often associated with entropy. In fact,

³⁰Examples of this type of criticism include Scott Simmon's discussion of Pynchon's use and fictionalization of film, "Beyond the Theater of War: Gravity's Rainbow as Film," and, in "The End of History? Thomas Pynchon and the Uses of the Past," Steven Weisenburger gives an overview of the possible sources for information about the V-2 rockets, in particular the way Pynchon has directly adapted material from the work of Walter Dorenberger, Basil Collier, and David Irving in his presentation of the effects of the bombings on London and the filming of the rocket.

Steven Best, in "Creative Paranoia: A Postmodern Aesthetic of Cognitive Mapping in Gravity's Rainbow," claims that Pynchon offers an "oppositional political dimension" from those "extreme postmodernists" who believe that "all cultural forms have been exhausted, and we are arcing toward the nihilistic collapse of society at the *fin-de-millennium*" (Best 62; 82).³¹ Best claims Gravity's Rainbow offers political possibilities even while it portrays the destructive potential inherent in social systems. In particular, he sees Pynchon as presenting a view of contemporary power that offers alternatives to the more nihilistic readings of "extreme postmodernists":

For Pynchon, there is a powerful sense of the end of history, not only in terms of the end of a linear, positivistic history based on cause and effect, but also the possible end of civilization itself. Giving us an encyclopedic referencing of the discourses of modernity and the possible outcome of its entropic breakdown, Pynchon can suggest that other options beside apocalyptic destruction exist. In general, he recognizes that however strong or perfected the structures of contemporary power, the possibility "that some chance of renewal, some dialectic, is still operating in history" (628-29). (Best 82)

However, the nature, and even the existence, of these possibilities for renewal is still

³¹In addition to the Krokors and Cook, Best includes Baudrillard in his "extreme postmodernist" category.

very much in contention among Pynchon scholars.³² Does the novel offer a position from which to challenge the structures of authority, to resist the control of the multinational corporations which his novels imply are puppeteers pulling the strings of every aspect of the novel's culture? Where are these possibilities to be found? In the linguistic/comic/parodic elements of the text? In the resistance of the dominant culture by the counterforce?³³ Or perhaps, even, in the realm of love? These ideas as well as others have been offered by critics as the sites of resistance within the text. Best, for instance, discovers resistance in the final section of Gravity's Rainbow entitled "The Counterforce," in the "allegory. . . of Byron the talking light bulb" and Roger Mexico's "pissing on the officials of the system, both figuratively through disruptive discourses at the dinner parties of bourgeoisie and literally at their business meetings" (82-83). Yet George Levine, in "Risking the Moment: Anarchy and Possibility in Pynchon's Fiction," finds the characters' attempts at resistance in the Counterforce ultimately unsatisfactory and claims Pynchon's anarchical or subversive

³²For instance, Marcel Cornis-Pope, in "Systematic Transgression and Cultural Rewriting in Pynchon's fiction," uses Tom LeClair's descriptions of systematic novels to claim that novels such as Gravity's Rainbow "do not significantly challenge 'the power systems that exist within and [that they] are about'(6)" (83). These novels are not as effective a "form of systematic disruption and cultural 'rewriting'" as those "found in 'surfiction' and in the innovative work of feminist writers" (87).

³³The counterforce is the name of the fourth and final part of the novel, "The Counterforce." However, the quote from Richard M. Nixon--"What?"--that begins the chapter helps establish the problematic nature of the counterforce in the novel. While figures such as Roger Mexico and Byron the Bulb, discussed briefly below, are seen as a part of the counterforce, it is never clear whether the counterforce is an organized entity, random acts by individuals resisting authority, or even an intricate part of the "They" system itself.

quality lies in the language and structure of the novel:

I'm not trying to reduce Pynchon into an 'anarchist,' though there are anarchists in each novel. The point is to recognize the risk-taking in his art as no mere decadent virtuosity (though it is partly that). There are thermodynamic surprises everywhere, shocks of possibility that can rip us out of our literary critical and human reductionism. The possibilities of an anarchic style and structure seem to me more centrally the 'subject' of Pynchon's fictions than even entropy or charisma or the preterit and elect of Calvinism or paranoia. (118)

According to Levine, Pynchon uses "catalogues of waste"--in a "Whitmanesque" manner--to challenge us to "resist the entropic reductionism of the systems we have been trained to impose on them" (116).³⁴ Both Levine and Best believe that Pynchon offers no alternative political perspective but only the possibility of resisting the "They" system. Levine describes Pynchon's world as "prepolitical," wherein "we must risk action and loss by penetrating the moment" and wherein the "risk is the possibility" (135). Best claims, however, that while "Pynchon helps dissuade us of any false optimism or facile utopian scheme of change, he fails to consider collective strategies that mobilize people around common political goals" (83). While both Best

³⁴Mendelson, in "Gravity's Encyclopedia," also looks at Pynchon's catalogues in a similar way; however, he uses Bakhtin to read Brigadier Pudding's coprophilia. And Ron Jenkins, in "Systematic Waste and the Body Boundary in Pynchon's Fiction" offers an excellent reading of the use of images of excrement in the novel (98-106), wherein he argues that Pynchon uses the connection between waste and "the human body as a metaphor for systems in general" (91).

and Levine recognize the multi-dimensionality and complexity of socio-political systems, they look for sites of resistance that exist externally to the systems of authority represented in the text. They repeat the assumption made by most of Pynchon's critics that the "They" system must be countered or resisted by some sort of "We" system.³⁵ Yet, as I have discussed in my opening two chapters, transgression does not need to step outside of the system to be effective. Indeed, locating any possibility for subversion in a "we" system is problematic because the "we" system is generally imagined to exist externally to that of the "They" system. However, most of the characters who are seen as possibly representing the "We" system, such as Roger Mexico, have a complicated relationship with the "They" system. They recognize that they are not even fully aware of their role within the "They" system and its interest in and control over them, thus making it virtually impossible for them to define a position of resistance to the system, since any action they take may actually have been precipitated or manipulated by the "They" system. Therefore, the best way to examine the potential for subversion, the possibility for transgressing the "They" system, lies not in the limited, individual sites of resistance offered in and by the "Counterforce" but in the central symbol of the "They" system in the novel, the V-2 Rocket.

While this novel is full of fascinating examples of transgression, from the

³⁵Best, for instance, says of the Counterforce, "Including Roger Mexico and others, the Counterforce, through creative paranoia, attempts to create a 'We' system of resistance in opposition to the 'They' system of domination" (83).

vividly detailed scene of Brigadier Pudding's coprophilia to Polker's incestuous relationship with his daughter, my discussion in this chapter will focus on a more prominent but less obvious example of transgressive potential in the text, the V-2 Rocket. The Rocket's presence shadows both the opening and closing of the novel, and it remains the focus of the novel even after Slothrop has faded out of existence. That is, while Slothrop disappears from the novel for hundreds of pages, the Rocket remains ever present and serves as a kind of unifying image bringing together elements of the plot that seem removed from Slothrop's story. The Rocket is, then, a better candidate for "main character" status than Slothrop. Not only is the Rocket the primary symbol of the "They" system, it is the primary recurring image in the text.³⁶

Using Butler's theory of "subversive repetition" discussed in the last chapter along with her description of the subversive potential of what she calls the "lesbian phallus" from Bodies that Matter, that I will discuss below, I will illustrate that the possibility for subversion of the dominant socio-political forces in the novel does not have to be located outside of the system, in the Counterforce, but instead can be

³⁶And in a text with over 400 characters and so many interweaving plots that summaries become interpretative debates, the recurrence of this image consistently throughout the novel is significant. The complexity of the novel also means that my focus in this chapter will be primarily on establishing the rocket as a possible site for subversion in the text. As I will illustrate in my conclusion, the rocket also provides a possible source for examining conceptions of power in the text; however, the complexity of the novel means that my examination of this element of the rocket will have to be developed at a later point in time.

discovered from within the system itself.³⁷ Before I look at the ways that the Rocket can reveal "alternative schemas for constituting sites" of resistance from within the "They" system, I shall briefly discuss the way some feminist criticism of Pynchon's work has conceived of the concepts of masculinity and femininity in his works to help illustrate how gender and power have previously been read in Gravity's Rainbow and Pynchon's work in general. In the reading that follows, I will explore how Butler's theorization of the subversive potential of the lesbian phallus helps reveal the transgressive potential of the Rocket, a potential that is based on the complexity of the Rocket's continual association with the phallus and the contradictory gendering of many of its descriptions in the novel. However, an understanding of how the relationship between masculine and feminine has previously been conceived by readers of the novel is also an important element in establishing the way in which the Rocket both institutes and reiterates the "privileged status" of "masculine technologies" as well as its subversive potential.

Molly Hite, in her 1994 essay "Feminist Theory and the Politics of Vineland,"

³⁷Butler, in the opening lines of "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary," remarks that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to satisfy the promise of such a title. By comparing the V-2 to a lesbian phallus, I find myself in a similar position. However, Butler says,

but perhaps the promise of the phallus is always dissatisfying in some way. I would like, then, to acknowledge that failure from the start and to work that failure for its uses and to suggest that something more interesting than satisfying the phallic ideal may come of the analysis I propose. (Bodies that Matter 56)

And it is to similar ends that I offer this comparison--that it may provide a more interesting and useful reading than those which focus primarily on the Rocket's more traditionally phallic representation.

finds Gravity's Rainbow less successful in terms of its critique of gender issues and power than its successor Vineland. She claims,

In contrast to Gravity's Rainbow, where the only possibility for opposition seems rooted in a prehistoric, or pre-Western historic, purity, associated with primal Nature and emblemized by such figures as 'the Great Serpent holding its own tail in its mouth' (GR 412) or the pre-Olympian Titans, Vineland suggests that originary purity was always a delusion. (Hite 147-48)

While Hite's reading of Vineland focuses on many of the elements of the association of gender with power that I will discuss in the context of Gravity's Rainbow, she ultimately finds the novel unsatisfactory because she cannot, finally, locate a site for subversion within the novel. I will suggest that the difficulty of discovering such a site in Gravity's Rainbow stems from the tendency of feminist critics of the novel to read the feminine as part of a binary pairing that aligns the masculine with technology and the feminine with Nature, and, as an extension of that set of terms, the feminine with the maternal and an ethics of caring.

While other binary pairings such as paranoia/anti-paranoia, order vs. chaos, or the elect vs. the preterit have been the primary focus of readings of the novel, the masculine/feminine binary is equally prominent within the text, especially in discussions relating to the Rocket and power. The most often quoted description of the Rocket, if not the most often quoted passage from the text, is the passage that begins this chapter. In these lines, Pynchon sets out these binary pairs and their

relationship to one another. That is, the language describing the Rocket links "masculine" with technology and, therefore, with the Rocket. Masculine sexuality and the materials of the Rocket are completely aligned and inseparable in the terms "masculine technologies" and "steel erections" (324). In fact, the masculine identity is so intertwined with technology, particularly the technology of destruction and death, that it is only by "understanding the Rocket" that Slothrop can "understand. . . his manhood" (324). Within this binary structure, understanding manhood means uniting with the structures of domination.

Pynchon criticism has tended to repeat the associations of this binary relationship when discussing the novel. For instance, Robert Newman, in Understanding Thomas Pynchon, says,

Male dominance, characterized by overreliance on rationality as a consequence of rejection of the dark side, aggressively inserts itself into the creative and nourishing realm of the Feminine and prostitutes that realm to proliferate the war. Pynchon permits his reader only glimpses into an occasional hiatus from the brutal rape of culture, but they are magical glimpses characterized by caring and acceptance. (Newman 129)

Newman's perceptions of the relationship of masculine and feminine forces in the text reveal an essentialized understanding of the feminine as a creative force that is opposed to the repressive and controlling masculine force. The opposition of these terms reflects the binary pairing outlined in this passage wherein the Rocket wins by

being able to keep the system from "Mother Nature," from "feminine darkness" (324). According to these conceptions of masculine and feminine, the feminine realm is the arena of creativity and caring, so the power of technology, of the patriarchy, is realized only through the brutal violation of this realm. It is terminology like this which leads Hite to conclude that Gravity's Rainbow offers us a "prehistoric, or pre-western historic, purity" as the only possible opposition to the dominant power structure, which is clearly masculine.³⁸ Within such a conception of masculine and feminine, the only possibility for resisting the dominant culture lies outside of the system, in a moment--prior to the present--before the feminine was corrupted by masculine technologies. The association of the feminine with nature in such a binary construction aligns it with those conceptions of the feminine which conceive of its power for liberation and/or subversion as pre-linguistic or, in Hite's terminology, "pre-historic."

However, as Alec McHoul and David Willis, in their 1990 Derridean reading of the text, point out, to discuss the novel in terms of "Binary Pairs" is to act as "if there had never been a wave of poststructuralism to cast radical doubt on the benefits of working with position/opposition binarity"(2).³⁹ Poststructuralist theory does

³⁸This alignment of the feminine with "Mother Nature" or a more general maternal position has produced a number of feminist readings of Pynchon which focus on the female characters and evaluate them, and a few male characters--Polker, in particular--based on idealized notions of caring and/or other qualities associated with essentialist conceptions of motherhood.

³⁹McHoul and Willis are critical of the lack of influence "Contemporary Literary Theory" has had on Pynchon criticism. Their criticism about the prominence of binary pairs is a minor point in their attempt to illustrate that most Pynchon criticism remains

challenge the use of binary pairs if they remain unquestioned formats for understanding the text, but that does not mean that exploring the terms of such binary pairs cannot be helpful in elucidating key constructions of power, sexuality, and even gender relations in the text. For instance, while Leo Bersani's discussion of paranoia in "Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature" illustrates the limitations of such pairings vividly by revealing the problematic usage of the term "paranoia" in the novel and by critics, it also shows the benefit of exploring in depth the terms of these binary constructions.⁴⁰ Examining the masculine/feminine binary and its connection to the technology/nature binary reveals a complex structuring of relationships that crosses borders and challenge the very structure of these binary pairings. Even critics who read the novel relying on the essentialized conception of femaleness and motherhood that is at the heart of this binary pairing find the borders of these binaries too limited. For instance, Marjorie Kaufman in "Brunnhilde and the Chemists: Women in Gravity's Rainbow," claims this relationship is more like a web than a binary

firmly entrenched in "New New Criticism." However, while they are correct both about the parallels between this text and poststructural criticism, their own attempts at plot summary illustrate why so much Pynchon criticism has taken this route: the characters, plot lines and details of the text are so complex as to offer considerable need for the insight into the text offered by those who "favour. . . more traditional exegetical pastimes" (2).

⁴⁰Bersani looks at the history of the term to show that Pynchon's usage of it alters its primary premises, since the characters both recognize themselves as paranoid (something a paranoid individual would not be able to do) and the very real possibility that their fears may not be paranoid but based in reality, since there is "evidence" in the text that Slothrop and others may indeed be under "Their" control.

separation of opposites:⁴¹

. . . once we examine the functions of the major women in the novel, we often see female-ness balanced by a parallel masculine figure or act; Gravity's Rainbow is an extraordinary web of links among characters and actions, doubles, role-playing, and role-reversing. Images of coordinating systems, parallel ideas, cross it at every point and at every level of theme and plot. (Kaufman 201)

In addition, as will be discussed below, she notes that even the masculine Rocket has maternal characteristics that complicates attempts to see it as a phallic ideal and representative of a purely masculine/technological power. It is ironic that almost everyone who writes about the novel notices the Rocket's "feminine elements"--the womb-like descriptions of the Rocket containing Gottfried and the references to female sexual organs in the descriptions of the Rocket's components--yet its status as a purely phallic, purely masculine image is never called into question. As will be apparent below, the Rocket is seen as a phallic ideal. However, the doubling which Kaufman refers to applies to the Rocket as well, and this is a doubling that challenges not only the phallic nature of the Rocket but the very "nature" of the phallus. And this transgressing of the gendered identification of the Rocket challenges the notion of "originary purity" as surely as does anything in Vineland. In addition, the Rocket

⁴¹I believe Kaufman has an essentialized notion of the feminine or, at least, of love, which in her article is described primarily through the concept of motherhood because she repeatedly refers to mothers and/or female characters who fail to recognize how "They" are manipulating them--thus making them ineffective or bad "mothers." In addition, she holds up Leni as an example of a "creative" kind of maternity (222).

represents more than just masculinity; it represents the association of masculinity with technology and power, which in the text is the power of the white, male patriarchy. Not surprisingly, then, this complex entanglement of descriptions that evoke the phallus with descriptions that evoke what I will call the lesbian phallus provides an excellent site for locating subversive possibility within the "They" system and exploring the liberatory potential of transgression in the novel.

In the second chapter of Bodies That Matter, "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary," Butler traces the history of the phallus and its status as "privileged signifier." Beginning with Freud's "On Narcissism: An Introduction," she looks at the way the phallus becomes the "privileged and generative signifier" through a collapsing of "substitutions" which leads Freud to present the male genitals as "an originary site of erotogenization which then subsequently becomes the occasion for a set of substitutions or displacements" (60). According to Butler, while Freud initially explains the phallus in terms of a psychic, or phantasmatic, displacement, this series of substitutions is forgotten (or hidden) and the phallus takes on the status of the privileged signifier which then generates other substitutions or displacements and is, therefore, granted an originary power. Butler wants to show that the phallus never has an originary position and is already itself a substitution or displacement. This move is important for Butler because she believes that language and the materiality of the body can never be separated. As she writes, "language and materiality are not opposed, for language both is and refers to that which is material, and what is material never fully escapes from the process by which it is signified" (68). Butler

wants to show that for both Freud and Lacan, "[r]ather than the postulated origin of signification or the signifiable, the phallus would be the effect of a signifying chain summarily suppressed" (81). The phallus has been held up as the privileged signifier as a way of asserting control--in this case, bodily control. But, as Butler shows in this chapter, this control is achieved only by denying its own construction. For instance, the penis and the phallus are linked, but while they are "fundamentally dependent upon" one another, the phallus "*must* negate the penis in order to symbolize and signify in its privileged way" (84). Butler then turns to the lesbian phallus as a challenge "to the 'privileged' status" of the phallus (85). Because the lesbian phallus can occupy both the position of "having" the phallus and "being" the phallus, it challenges the notion of the phallus as an originary or privileged site and illustrates that "the phallus is a transferable phantasm, and its naturalized link to masculine morphology can be called into question through an aggressive reterritorialization" (86).⁴² Butler notes that while the lesbian phallus may come "into play" through the "degrading of the feminine" or through "a castrating occupation of that central masculine trope" which would "overturn" the "degradation of the feminine," neither of these positions serves to challenge the stability of both the "masculine" and the "feminine" (87). The subversive potential of the lesbian phallus comes through its ability to challenge the privileged status of the phallus, through its ability to reveal the instability of crucial positions that supposedly establish the

⁴²Butler discusses Lacan's distinction between "being" and "having" the phallus more thoroughly in "Lacan, Riviere, and the Strategies of Masquerade" in Gender Trouble, pages 43-47.

boundaries of such a status. The lesbian phallus reveals that the phallus becomes privileged only through its constant reiteration and, thus, can be contested. In addition, this disclosure reveals that structures associated with it are variable and plastic (89). According to Butler,

When the phallus is lesbian, then it is and is not a masculinist figure of power; the signifier is significantly split, for it both recalls and displaces the masculinism by which it is impelled. And insofar as it operates at the site of anatomy, the phallus (re)produces the spectre of the penis only to enact its vanishing, to reiterate and exploit its perpetual vanishing as the very occasion of the phallus. (89)

The lesbian phallus, then, challenges the originary or privileged position of the phallus, and, therefore, it also challenges the originary or privileged position of the masculine. It complicates attempts to essentialize either the masculine or feminine position. It is for this reason that I propose reading the Rocket as a lesbian phallus, as a counterpart to the usual reading of it as a phallic image; as I interpret it, the Rocket is a complicated image that does not merely repeat the binary pairing of masculine/feminine already discussed above. Instead, it challenges the terms of that pairing as well as offering a critique of both the conflation of the penis with the phallus and the masculine with power. According to Butler,

The lesbian phallus may be said to intervene as an unexpected consequence of the Lacanian scheme, an apparently contradictory signifier which, through a critical mimesis, calls into question the

ostensibly originating and controlling power of the Lacanian phallus, indeed, its installation as the privileged signifier of the symbolic order. The move emblemized by the lesbian phallus contests the relationship between the logic of non-contradiction and the legislation of compulsory heterosexuality at the level of symbolic and bodily morphogenesis. Consequently, it seeks to open up a discursive site for reconsidering the tacitly political relations that constitute and persist in the divisions between body parts and wholes, anatomy and the imaginary, corporeality and the psyche. (74)

Reading the Rocket as a lesbian phallus opens up such "discursive sites" and allows us to reconsider the "political relations" which Gravity's Rainbow offers.

The first sentence of the novel introduces the spectre of the Rocket: "A screaming comes across the sky" (Pynchon 3). From the first, the Rocket is a site of contradictions because the V-2 rocket is a reversal in bombing terror; you hear it only after it has already hit, and if you hear it, then you have survived its threat. Nevertheless, as I mentioned above, while critics have noted the contradictions in the representation of the Rocket, it is always read as a phallic image, perhaps even the perfect phallic image. Newman's description of the Rocket is typical: "a giant metallic phallus to eradicate any primitive sexual threat" (99). In the novel, rockets are referred to, on a number of occasions, directly as "cocks." For example, when Slothrop sees a picture of the atomic bomb, it is a photo of "a giant white cock, dangling in the sky straight downward out of a white pubic bush" (693). Not only is

it constantly associated with the phallus when it is described, but as the primary symbol of the power of the "They" system in the novel, it evokes the classic association of power with the phallus. Slothrop, in fact, seeks the Rocket and tries to understand everything about it because he thinks the Rocket holds the key to "understanding his manhood." Such descriptions make clear that the characters in the novel not only associate the Rocket with the phallus but conceive of it as the representation of the male sexual organ, often even the representation of their own penises. And the "steel erections" of the Rocket represent the ultimate masculinity; they are also seen as the cold, metallic embodiment of power in the novel. Thus, it serves as a representative of the dominant masculine structures of power in the novel and becomes the instrument for controlling those elements of the culture associated with resistance.

Yet, from early on in the novel, the complexity of this image, and its relation to power and Slothrop's manhood, reveals that the phallus is much more illusive and problematic a concept than the masculine/feminine binary which often defines it would indicate. In Gravity's Rainbow, the conflation of the phallus with the penis is carried a step further so that the Rocket, as the image of the phallus, becomes conflated with the penis, and Slothrop's penis in particular. Yet as Butler points out, conflating the penis with the phallus only serves to reveal the contradiction inherent in the construction of the phallus as a privileged signifier. By extending this conflation to the Rocket and the penis, the artificiality and transferability of the privileged status of the phallus becomes clear. Pynchon emphasizes this by having

Slothrop's penis and its activity become the potential key to predicting the flight patterns of the V-2 rocket. The search to discover the connection between Slothrop's erection and orgasms and the V-2 is the primary plot in the novel, but a key element in this plot has thus far been overlooked in Pynchon criticism. This search never reveals the connection; instead, it reveals the impossibility of making such a connection. That is, it reveals the problem inherent in conflating the penis with the Rocket and, by extension, the phallus. Like the lesbian phallus, it reveals that the phallus is not a stabilized and consistent site.

Slothrop's mapping of his sexual encounters does match the map for rocket strikes, but his map is no more helpful for predicting where the rockets will fall or where the safest place to be is than is Roger Mexico's Poisson equation.⁴³ Unless they can figure out the cause/effect connection between Slothrop and the rocket strikes, then the map and what it represents--Slothrop's orgasms--cannot be exploited by "Them" to gain a technological advantage. However, none of the possible theories as to how this relation works or what has brought it about can be proven. For instance, Pointsman believes that during the testing performed on him as an infant, using Impolex G, "Baby Slothrop" has been trained (tortured) into an "ultraparadoxical phase" which allows him to recognize the coming of the rocket. But, as Spectro reminds him, Slothrop's responses represent a reversal of the standard

⁴³The Poisson equation tells "for a number of hits arbitrarily chosen, how many squares will get none, how many one, two, three, and so on (55). So, Slothrop's map may be more effective at telling one what areas to stay out of since the rocket strikes follow his orgasms, but it doesn't say exactly when they will fall or clarify the connection between his erection and the Rocket.

stimulus/response equation, since his orgasms precede the rocket strikes. Pointsman offers the following solution:

" . . .He's out there, and he can *feel them coming* days in advance. But it's a reflex. A reflex to something that's in the air *right now*.

Something we're too coarsely put together to sense--but *Slothrop can*."

(49)

If it were even possible to have such a reflex, the question remains what exactly it is that Slothrop is responding to. Spectro, who is skeptical of Pointsman's reasoning, asks himself, "And is it really the rocket explosion that Slothrop's keying on, or is it exactly *this depolarizing*, this neurotic 'confusion' that fills the wards tonight?" (50). Pointsman believes that it is perhaps a reversal of some "sound stimuli," an auditory "reversal," but this argument is further complicated by the auditory reversal already a part of the Rocket, wherein it is so fast that its impact precedes the sound of it coming in. Further, there are other theories about Slothrop's connection to the rocket strikes. For instance, "Roger Mexico thinks it's a statistical oddity," and Rollo Groast "thinks it's a prerecognition" and may, in fact, have nothing to do with sex; he just knows where the rockets are going to fall--but this, of course, doesn't really explain the similarity in the maps (85). Edwin Treacle believes that "Slothrop is, with the force of his mind, *causing* the rockets to drop where they do. He may not be physically highballing them about the sky; but maybe he is fooling with the electrical signals inside the rocket's guidance system" (85). All of these theories, as well as many others including the speculation that Slothrop's penis may have been

replaced by Impolex G and thus connected to the substance of the Rocket, are debated by the characters in the novel and its critics, but there is no ready solution to this question in the novel.⁴⁴ Despite the fact that "They" set out to test Slothrop, to "expose" him to "the German Rocket," neither "They" nor the readers ever discover the explanation for the connection between Slothrop's erections and the Rocket's strikes (82).⁴⁵

Once he "escapes" into the Zone, Slothrop associates himself with the Rocket; he searches for it and for information about it, feeling that it holds the key to understanding himself.⁴⁶ And, he turns out to be correct because, during his journey, he discovers the connection between Laszlo Jamf and the Rocket, and he learns that his own father sold him to Laszlo Jamf for the Impolex G experiments in exchange for money to provide him with a college education. He even dubs himself "Rocketman," "Raketemensch!" when he discovers a helmet that, when the horns are removed, looks "just like the nose assembly of the Rocket" (366). Slothrop's search

⁴⁴Lawrence Wolfley, in "Repression's Rainbow: The Presence of Norman O. Brown in Pynchon's Big Novel," claims "it may even be that [Slothrop's] penis has been replaced or grafted with Impolex G. Genital (which could be what G stands for) organization is for Slothrop precisely a tyranny; the penis he thought was his own belongs to the firm. . ." (114).

⁴⁵The fact that Slothrop has an erection when he is studying the Rocket at "The White Visitation" is evidence that there is actually a connection, and that the relationship is not merely random, but the exact correlation between these things is not known, either by Slothrop or those who observe him.

⁴⁶I put the term "escapes" in quotations since it is clear that Slothrop is allowed to escape so that he can be observed, even though it is not always clear when he is under observation, since some of those assigned to watch him lose track of him once he is wandering in the Zone--but the novel often has levels of "Theys," and it is impossible to know at what point he might be completely out of "Their" sight and/or control.

for the Rocket proves unsatisfactory, nevertheless; it turns out that the Rocket itself does not provide him with the answers he seeks, and he finds himself increasingly distracted and distanced from his search for it as he travels in the Zone. His adventures as Rocketman take him further from the Rocket, instead of uniting him with it, and once he leaves that costume behind and puts on the Pig costume, he has actually ceased to search actively for the Rocket, and he seems to be merely moving from place to place at the whim of "fate"--although, perhaps, "They" are still behind his progress.

Both the scientists' inability to explain the connection between Slothrop's connection to the Rocket and his own inability finally to discover himself in it reveal a great deal about the way the Rocket functions in the text. It is the "signifier" that many of the characters in the novel are seeking. In fact, it even becomes a "holy text" for Enzian and his people. According to Newman, the "magical rejuvenate powers of the 00001, derived from the unified mandelic vision of a cult which marries the supernatural to the natural world, would counter the flight of the 00000, created by a sterile system of reason as a godless weapon to use against the earth" (119). But what kind of magic the rocket holds and whether or not it will rejuvenate them or be the force which brings about their final destruction is never revealed in the novel. For instance, since the drive to destruction has become so deeply embedded in the cultural identity of the Erdschweinhohlers, their idolization of an instrument of death evokes the possibility of genocide as much as liberation. While the Rocket serves as a privileged signifier for most of the characters in the novel, Pynchon

reveals that such a privileging is always fictional. As Enzian shows, the Rocket's signification is constructed by the reiteration of the terms an individual or group assigns to it. That is, Enzian and his people can turn the Rocket into a religion only by associating it with their own religious customs and images; similarly, Pointsman can discover in the Rocket and Slothrop's connection to it his addition to Pavlov's work, his ticket to the Nobel Prize in Science, by writing the same Rocket into a stimulus/response drama involving Slothrop's penis.

However, while the proliferation of the Rocket's significations reveals that such associations are always constructed, it does not in and of itself provide a sufficient challenge to seeing the Rocket as a phallus, since the phallus is always an idealizing structure, one that can contain a multitude of significations. At the same time, when this multiplicity is combined with the feminine descriptions of the Rocket, the split of the "signifier" which Butler discovers in the lesbian phallus becomes impossible to overlook (89). From the beginning, Pynchon's critics have made reference to the feminine aspects of the Rocket, in particular to the 00000 Rocket which contains Gottfried. Tony Tanner, in Thomas Pynchon, describes the complicated gendering of the Gottfried's launching:

The trajectory of the rocket--which at the end of the novel is both a womb (it contains the living figure of Gottfried) and a coffin (arguably embodying the death and perversion of all life-giving love and sexuality)--exactly enacts this stark ironic ambiguity. And in this apparently hopelessly proliferating novel the rocket is always there. It

is both phallic and fatal. (Tanner 78-79)

However, Tanner sees the womb-like qualities as secondary to the phallic qualities of the Rocket; the former is interesting enough to comment on, but it provides no challenge to his understanding of the Rocket as phallic. The recognition of the womb-like quality of Gottfried in the Rocket continues in other contemporary readings of the novel; as I mentioned above, Kaufman notes this as well in her discussion of Gottfried's launching:

Although it is startling, it is not then surprising to see the mothers linked, as early as V., to the 'bomb's trajectory,' nor to find that the Rocket itself is an equally helpless mother, carrying its Schwarzgerat as the womb its fetus. (Kaufman 213)

While Kaufman associates the Rocket with a mother for a moment, she sees it as a "helpless mother" who, like most of the feminine characters in the novel, is unable to escape from the destructive power of the masculine. For Kaufman, the power of the masculine and its binary opposition to the creative, maternal feminine is never challenged by such descriptions. However, if the Rocket is seen as a lesbian phallus, then, as Butler claims, the stability of both masculine and feminine has been challenged. These descriptions of the Rocket as womb-like and maternal radically undermine the phallic descriptions and associations which are at the heart of the novel. They reveal the instability of the categories of phallic and maternal because the Rocket, the ideal phallic image, can occupy both positions simultaneously.

The ostensibly phallic Rocket is, then, described in terms that associate it with

both masculine and feminine sexuality. Not only is the 00000 Rocket presented as a womb, surrounding Gottfried in the plastic equivalent of a uterus, but the Rocket is also described as being perfectly suited to anal intercourse: "Its steel hindquarters bent so beautifully. . . he fits well" (750-751). It is thus both womb and anus for Gottfried; both positioned to provide him with a perfect fit. In addition, the Rocket whose shape is so clearly phallic is presented, internally, as a female genital. One of its instruments is described as the "one test-point. . .the true clitoris, routed directly into the nervous system of the 00000" (751). Gottfried is encouraged to find this "pressure switch," to explore the Rocket and "[f]ind the zone of love, lick and kiss," before the Rocket takes off (751). The descriptions of the Rocket also confuse heat and cold, since Gottfried is encouraged to heat up the Rocket sexually prior to its launching, but it is the launching of the Rocket which will "fire" this clitoris, and its firing will literally consume Gottfried. This scene proves to be even more complex in that the description of Gottfried in the 00000 rocket is highly sexual. That is, Gottfried himself is presented as an erotic object:

His smooth feet, bound side by side, are in white satin slippers with white bows. His red nipples erect. The golden hairs on his back, alloyed German gold, pale yellow to white, run symmetric about his spine, run in arches fine and whirled as the arches of a fingerprint, as filings along magnetic lines of force. Each freckle or mole is a dark, precisely-set anomaly in the field. Sweat gathers at his nape. (750).

However, these erotic descriptions are surrounded by images which reveal that this

eroticization is only Weismann's/Blicero's construction. Gottfried is a "giant white fly: an erect penis buzzing in white lace, clotted with blood or sperm" and "gagged with a white kid glove" (750). The white man, the bleached one, is just setting up another of his fantasies using Gottfried, but this fantasy will result in Gottfried's death. The "fire" of the Rocket is described as that of an oven, which recalls for the reader Blicero's Hansel and Gretel fantasy, but in this fantasy Hansel will not escape the witch; instead, he is entombed in the oven when the 00000 Rocket is launched:

The Stats plugs lie blasted on the ground, tossing in the splash of flame. On gravity feed, the flame is bright yellow. Then the turbine begins to roar. The flame suddenly turns blue. The sound of it grows to full cry. The Rocket stays a moment longer on the steel table, then slowly, trembling, furiously muscular, it begins to rise. Four seconds later it begins to pitch over. But the flame is too bright for anyone to see Gottfried inside, except now as an erotic category, hallucinated out of that blue violence, for the purposes of self-arousal. (758)

Once the Rocket is launched, Blicero/Weismann can only imagine Gottfried; he must arouse himself with a fantasy spun out of the real life sacrifice he has made out of the boy. The reader, however, experiences what Blicero/Weismann can only imagine, Gottfried's experience in the Rocket. Although he is trapped in a rocket, beginning the ascent to his death, Gottfried imagines the promise of escape; he "rises on a promise, a prophecy, of Escape" (758). But this promise is not fulfilled, and Gottfried finds too soon that the rocket is descending to earth.

There is debate about which Rocket is descending in the final section of the text, "Descent," but considering that this section follows "Ascent" which describes Gottfried's experience in the Rocket, it seems logical to see the rocket quickly reaching its "last unmeasurable gap above the roof of this old theater," above the audience's head, as the same rocket--the 00000.⁴⁷ The final image of a rocket in the text, then, is the most complex. It challenges the association of the Rocket with the phallus and with the masculine through its use of female anatomy--in particular, both the clitoris and the womb, two perspectives of the female anatomy not generally aligned with one another in discussions. However, at the same time, it maintains the phallic associations which are more commonly associated with it. It is eroticized in both a homosexual and heterosexual relationship to Gottfried, and, yet, Gottfried is also presented as an erotic object exploited by Blicero/Weismann for his own erotic fantasies. These conflictual images cannot be reduced; there are no easy conflation of gender with any one anatomical position in the text. The Rocket that hangs over the audience at the end of the novel becomes "a displacement of the hegemonic symbolic of (heterosexist) sexual difference and the critical release of alternative imaginary schemas for constituting sites of erotogenic pleasure" (Butler, Bodies that Matter 91). The descriptions of the Rocket reveal it as polymorphously perverse and, therefore, disrupt any attempt to see it as simply phallic, and simply as a tool of the white male patriarchy, since even though the "white man" of the text constructs the

⁴⁷Critics who claim that it is not the same rocket base that claim on the chronological sequencing of the scene in the novel.

fantasy of Gottfried in the Rocket, the fantasy remains finally out of his control.

The "alternative imaginary schemas" do more than just constitute sites of "erotogenic pleasure," however. Because the Rocket is one of the most prominent symbols of masculine, technological power in the text, the originary status of these systems of power is challenged as well. The Rocket itself was made possible by just such a challenge to originary structures. As Pynchon has Jamf say, prior to Kekule's dream of the serpent eating its own tail,

we had been given certain molecules, certain combinations and not others. . . we used what we found in Nature, unquestioning, shamefully perhaps--but the Serpent whispered, "*They can be changed*, and new molecules assembled from the debris of the given. . . (413).

The benzene ring made plastic and, thus, the Rocket possible.⁴⁸ Thus, the material of the Rocket represents a challenge to established structures; it is only by reconceiving of molecules, once thought to be firmly established and unchallengeable, that the Rocket is born. Likewise, it is in the unchallenged notion of the Rocket as a phallic representation that Gravity's Rainbow offers its most subversive example of transgression. Butler claims,

The offering of the lesbian phallus suggests that the signifier can come to signify *in excess* of its structurally mandated position; indeed, the signifier can be repeated in contexts and relations that come to *displace*

⁴⁸This understanding of the Rocket's dependence on a restructuring of molecules was inspired by Morgan Speer's discussion of the invention of the benzene ring, in "Gravity's Rainbow: What's the Big Idea?" (70).

the privileged status of that signifier. The "structure" by which the phallus signifies the penis as its privileged occasion exists only through being instituted and reiterated and, by virtue of that temporalization, is unstable and open to subversive repetition. (Bodies that Matter 90)

The Rocket in Gravity's Rainbow comes to "signify in excess" its "structurally mandated position." By revealing the various significations different characters associate with the phallic Rocket, Pynchon illustrates the way that the phallus is reiterated and instituted, and this allows the Rocket's status as a privileged signifier to be challenged, even while it appears to be reinforced. The very act of displacing the phallus onto the Rocket, of conflating the penis with the phallic image of the Rocket, makes clear that the phallus is not stable but "open to variation and plasticity" (Butler, Bodies that Matter 89). In addition, the complex gendering of the Rocket, especially in relation to 00000, challenges the masculine association of the Rocket which is central to a binary understanding of gender in the novel. But the subversive potential of the Rocket also extends beyond the realm of gender and sexuality.

The Rocket offers, in fact, a possibility for challenging the "They" system of the novel without resorting to a "We" system or some essentialist version of the feminine. The Rocket represents phallic power in the novel; it is the symbol of the white, male patriarchy that many of readers of Pynchon have felt was being critiqued in the novel. Therefore, if the Rocket itself can become the site for a subversive repetition of the phallus, it can also provide a possible source for examining conceptions of power in the novel. Like the phallus, the "They" system has a

privileged position in the text, an almost "originary" power which seems endless, unknowable, and almost impossible to subvert. However, as the Rocket reveals, the power of the phallus is dependent on the reiteration and institution of that power. It can be challenged, and the Rocket, ironically, offers the most effective site for exploring such a challenge.

CHAPTER FIVE

The "mysterious eroticism of wounds": The Postmodern Techno-Body and the Artificiality of Desire in J.G. Ballard's Crash

Vaughn unfolded for me all his obsessions with the mysterious eroticism of wounds: the perverse logic of blood-soaked instrument panels, seat-belts smeared with excrement, sun-visors lined with brain tissue. For Vaughn each crashed car set off a tremor of excitement, in the complex geometries of a dented fender, in the unexpected variations of crushed radiator grilles, in the grotesque overhang of an instrument panel forced on to a driver's crotch as if in some calibrated act of machine fellatio. The intimate time and space of a single human being had been fossilized for ever in this web of chromium knives and frosted glass.

J.G. Ballard, Crash

The landscapes of J.G. Ballard's science fiction novels are often described as "mindscales," as external manifestations of his characters' internal thoughts and feelings.⁴⁹ Although Ballard is known for his decaying and dystopic landscapes, it is the realistic and almost mundane landscape of Crash, with its focus on the roadways that serve London's airport, which represents the most disturbing of all Ballard's mindscales. Ballard takes such familiar settings as exit and on-ramps, highways, and interstate medians and creates a novel that Scott Buckatman in "Postcards from the Posthuman Solar System" claims has a "level of transgression" few "works of SF

⁴⁹Ballard's use of "mindscales" is discussed by a number of critics. For example, see Reinhart Lutz's "The Two Landscapes of J.G. Ballard's Concrete Island" or Colin Greenland's chapter on Ballard in The Entropy Exhibition.

[science fiction], indeed of literature, have attained" (345). One of the earliest responses to the novel, recounted by Ballard in an interview with Alan Burns and Charles Sugnet, illustrates how disturbing many readers find this work; this response from one of the "publisher's readers...included the statement: 'The author is beyond psychiatric help'" (Burns and Sugnet 22). Nicholas Ruddick, in "Ballard/ Crash/ Baudrillard," claims that this negative reaction to the text comes from an "unsympathetic critic" who mistakes the author for the narrator, a mistake encouraged by the fact that they share the same name, "James Ballard" (354). As the response to the film version of Crash, directed by David Cronenberg and presented at the 1996 Cannes film festival, illustrates, the reaction of the publisher's reader is fairly representative of the public at large. Audiences watching the film not only threw items at the screen, but they attacked the actors (Holly Hunter, James Spader and Patricia Arquette) at the press party afterwards.⁵⁰

However, as with Acker, academic responses to Ballard's novel have been quite different from those of the public at large. Rather than finding the novel offensive and obscene--the work of a mind too sick to be cured through proper psychiatric care--these readings grant Crash a unique and celebrated status among contemporary novels. In "Ballard's Crash," for example, Jean Baudrillard celebrates

⁵⁰In addition, the judges found the movie so appalling that they invented a special award category for it; on May 20, 1996, they awarded the movie the "Prix Special du Jury" for "daring, originality, and audacity" ("Crash" online n.p.). Several judges were so offended by the film, they refused to participate in this action. The screenplay for the film was written by David Cronenberg, and it was produced by Robert Lantos for Fine Line Features.

the novel's presentation of "a sexuality that is without referentiality and without limits" (313).⁵¹ In addition, he claims that to read the novel as a perversion, whether you are a publisher's reader or the author himself, is to misunderstand its significance.

In the "Introduction to the French Edition," written in 1974, Ballard claims that the car is a "total metaphor for man's life in society," a metaphor for "an extreme crisis" present in contemporary society (6). Then, he asks,

Do we see, in the car crash a sinister portent of a nightmare marriage between sex and technology? Will modern technology provide us with a hitherto undreamed of means for tapping our own psychopathologies? Is this harnessing of our innate perversity conceivably of benefit to us? Is there some deviant logic unfolding more powerful than that provided by reason? (6)

Ballard concludes this introduction by claiming that the "ultimate role of Crash is cautionary"; it serves as "a warning against the brutal, erotic and overlit realm that beckons more and more persuasively to us from the margins of the technological

⁵¹This article was first published in French in 1976. It was later summarized by Jonathan Bension in English in 1984, in the November issue of Foundation (Ruddick 354). The translation I am using was printed in 1991 in Volume 18 of Science-Fiction Studies. Several of the articles I refer to in this essay were printed in the same issue under the heading "In Response to Jean Baudrillard"; these include those by N. Katherine Hayles and Vivian Sobchack. Nicholas Ruddick's essay, which appeared in Volume 19, is a response to these essays, particularly the comments by Ballard that, as Ruddick explains in a footnote, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr, the editor of Volume #18, put together from a letter sent to him by Ballard in response to Csicsery-Ronay's request to respond to Baudrillard and his respondents' comments on the novel (359).

landscape" (6). However, Baudrillard disagrees with Ballard's claims in this introduction as well as those who use Ballard's introduction to justify their position that Crash provides a moral lesson about the threats to individual humanity posed by such a version of desire. Baudrillard claims,

There is no possibility of dysfunction in the universe of the accident; thus no perversion either. The Accident, like death, is no longer of the order of the neurotic, of the repressed, of the residual, or of the transgressive; it is the initiator of a new manner of *non-perversed* pleasure (contrary to what the author himself says in his introduction when he speaks of a new perversion), of a strategic reorganization of life beyond the perspective of death. (315)

Buckatman and Baudrillard both read Crash as a powerful and liberatory work of fiction. While Buckatman declares the novel one of the best examples of transgressive fiction, Baudrillard believes that the novel has moved beyond transgression. For Baudrillard, Ballard has managed to achieve what Klossowski sees as the paradox of transgression; he has created a text wherein transgression has resolved "itself into a state of affairs in which it would no longer be necessary" (21).⁵² Buckatman agrees that in Crash Ballard has created a "landscape in which the erotic is denied, repressed, and paved over by layers of concrete, tarmac, and chrome" (345). Yet, he nonetheless believes that Ballard "simultaneously mocks and

⁵²I have discussed this paradox above, in Chapter One (pages 22-24). My response to Baudrillard's claims will be discussed later in this chapter.

evokes the 'drive' towards transcendence and continuity" (345). In academic discussions, instead of alienating readers, the "perversity" of the text and what Ballard is attempting to accomplish through this particular drama of transgression have become the central points of discussion about the text. Therefore, for academic reviewers the central question raised about the text is whether the novel celebrates or criticizes the sexuality it portrays.

The responses of Vivian Sobchack and N. Katherine Hayles to the translation of Baudrillard's article printed in the 1991 issue of Science-Fiction Studies illustrate the disagreement that has arisen over exactly what kind of transgression the text provides and what end it serves. Vivian Sobchack, in "Baudrillard's Obscenity," claims that Baudrillard's "descriptions of the postmodern techno-body" are "dangerously partial and naively celebratory" because his "techno-body is a body that is *thought* always as an *object*, and never *lived* as a *subject*" (327). Sobchack believes that both Ballard's comments on the novel in his introduction to the French edition and the "technical" style of his presentation of the sexual encounters in the novel support her reading of the novel as a warning to readers about the dangers inherent in the "techno-body." She believes that Baudrillard overlooks Ballard's tone and ignores his own comments about the "cautionary" nature of the novel.

...he reads Ballard's Crash obscenely--that is, off to the side. Getting all the description right, he gets the tone all wrong and thus, where Ballard is cautionary and his prose (as Baudrillard recognizes) technical, Baudrillard is celebratory and his own prose impassioned.

Rejecting Ballard's unflinching--if fascinated--disgust and contempt for the world he ironically anatomizes in Crash (articulated in Ballard's introduction to the French edition and in the rigorously reductive, anti-erotic technology of the novel's style), Baudrillard belies Ballard as he stands in for (and as proof of) all that's wrong with Vaughn. (327)

Sobchack claims that Baudrillard repeats the position of Vaughn rather than that of Ballard, and for this reason, he embraces a body which will lead to a "dead end" (328). She also claims that Baudrillard is "dangerous" because he celebrates the objectification and abstraction of the human body in Crash and, thus, fails to recognize the "moral gaze" that is a part of the text, although not a part of the character Vaughn.⁵³

N. Katherine Hayles, in "The Borders of Madness," agrees with Baudrillard's reading of the text as articulating a "new kind of sexuality emerging from the technological transformation of the body into an eroticized surface capable of merging at any point with other artifacts" (322). Yet, Hayles, like Sobchack, finds Baudrillard's unconditional celebration of the text problematic. She believes that his

⁵³While typical, Sobchack's separation of the narrator from Vaughn is problematic. She needs this separation in order to posit a "moral gaze" within the text itself. However, as I will discuss below, since the narrator not only follows Vaughn willingly but by the end of the novel actually occupies the dominant role in their relationship, the "moral gaze" that Sobchack seeks cannot be found in the novel itself. Sobchack indicates that this "moral gaze" is seen in the unimpassioned (as opposed to Baudrillard's impassioned) discussion of desire in the text. This, too, is problematic because the technical nature of the erotic scenes in the novel may be due to the fact that the descriptions of these encounters are meant to illustrate the interactions between techno-bodies and do not necessarily express a particular moral tone.

failure to recognize the "borders separating simulations from reality" makes Baudrillard's reading "dangerous" (322).⁵⁴ She also agrees with Sobchack that Ballard intends the text to be a "warning" to readers. She says,

It is difficult to miss the point that the erotic transformations are expressions precisely of a drive toward transcendence that does in fact culminate in flight, a flight to death. Only by ignoring this riot of signification could one argue that there is no moral point to Crash, no warning in the borders it draws around its characters. (323)

Hayles and Sobchack, then, disagree with Baudrillard along similar lines, but Hayles is willing to explore the version of desire presented by Ballard and celebrated by Baudrillard, even if that desire culminates in "a flight to death." However, she disagrees with Baudrillard's claim that "desire is absent" from the text and claims desire is instead "reconfigured and intensified" (322). Hayles believes that this reconfiguration of desire must be examined and not simply celebrated unconditionally or read solely as a cautionary warning. With its eroticization of wounds and techno-

⁵⁴For Hayles, the separation between what happens in fiction and what happens in human culture is an important boundary, a boundary she believes Baudrillard ignores. It is for this reason that although she recognizes some of the same problems in Baudrillard's essay that Sobchack sees, she believes that Crash offers insights into sexuality that need to be explored. She occupies a kind of middle ground between Baudrillard and Sobchack in that she refuses to deny the possibility of a moral point in Crash, to read the novel purely as a celebration, but she also finds the reconfiguration of desire in the text too intriguing to read it merely as a cautionary tale.

bodies, Crash presents what is clearly a vision of a postmodern desire,⁵⁵ but what kind of desire this is and how it is supposed to be read are matters of much discussion and argument. Is this a "cautionary tale," a warning about the dangerous direction desire has taken? Or is it a vision of new desire which, as Baudrillard claims, is removed from the realm of the neurotic and repressed? What is at stake here is what is gained or lost by this presentation of desire. Whom does it serve? Is it liberatory or just, as Sobchack claims, a "dead end"?

In the schema I have outlined in this dissertation, Baudrillard is very much in the ecstatic camp. His view of the transgressive elements of Crash is that they represent desires that have the power to destroy all boundaries. Sobchack, on the other hand, reflects the humanist notion of mutual intersubjectivity as the basis for sexuality and gender relations; she assumes that a productive conception of desire would always treat bodies as subjects never as objects. Butler would reject both positions. In Butlerian terms, Baudrillard represents a utopian notion of desire that, as I have discussed above, ends up denying the way desire functions in the text (and the world), and Sobchack seems to need to have humanist (normative) standards for deciding what is and what is not acceptable sexuality. Butler's understanding of the way desire is constructed provides a more adequate reading of the text because she offers a schema for exploring how desire functions in the text and because she

⁵⁵In the reading of the text that follows, I will discuss in more depth how both of these elements reflect the denaturalization of desire and the artificiality of gender and sexual identity that I have previously claimed are key elements in postmodern desire.

recognizes that desire is not a force that exists outside of socio-cultural structures. For instance, in the reading that follows, I will use Butler to discuss how the novel challenges normative heterosexuality not by exploding its boundaries but through altering the terms of the reiteration of desires that establish what is considered normative sexuality. As with Acker, we cannot merely celebrate the transgressive nature of Crash, as Baudrillard does. Baudrillard celebrates the "explosive vision" of Ballard's techno-bodies, bodies that have "neither organs nor organ pleasures" and are "entirely dominated by gash marks, excisions, and technical scars--all under the gleaming sign of a sexuality that is without referentiality and without limits" (313). However, it is important to look closely at the way desire is constructed in the text rather than just assuming that such desire is itself "without limits" and unquestionably liberatory. We must question what kind of critique of contemporary structures of gender and sexuality, if any, is offered by Ballard's erotization of the car crash, in "the kinaesthetics of the highway," and the creation of a unique cyborg relationship between automobiles and human beings.

Before I discuss how a Butlerian reading of the novel reveals its challenges to normative sexuality, I will look briefly at Donna Haraway's concept of the cyborg, since this concept helps reveal the artificiality of desire that is central to the Butlerian understanding of transgression I am advocating. In addition, Ballard's "marriage of sex and technology" reflects the "couplings between organism and machine" that Donna Haraway uses to define cyborgs in her essay, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980's." In her manifesto,

Haraway advocates cyborgs as an important way for feminism to map its "social and bodily reality" and to suggest alternative ways of perceiving gender and sexuality. She claims that the cyborg reveals important boundaries and sites for the possibility for change:

The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation. In the traditions of Western science and politics--the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other--the relation between organism and machine have been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination. This chapter is an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction. (191)

As I will illustrate in my reading of Crash, Ballard merges the technology of automobiles with human bodies. His linking of the technology of the car with human beings is unique, not just another coupling between a human being and a computer, and it presents important insights into the border war Haraway outlines.

Haraway claims that cyborgs "have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that are used to apply to organism and

machines" (194). Ballard's presentation of an eroticism that is based in a cyborgian relationship reflects, then, exactly the denaturalization of desire that Butler advocates. Crash portrays a world wherein the artificiality of desire is clear, where the boundaries of what is considered normative sexuality and what is considered perverse sexuality have been erased. A Butlerian aesthetic affirms mutability and freedom: eroticism is able, even encouraged, to adapt to the most extreme situations--such as death and suffering. For example, there is no longer any such thing as a perverse erotics; anything, including wounds and car crashes, can be transformed into the realm of the erotic. Yet, when we look at the vision of desire presented in Crash, the questions about such eroticism cannot be ignored. For Butler, normative sexuality seems to be defined only by the freedom of invention, the ability to transform itself. However, Butler recognizes that this freedom can best be understood if we recognize the way that sexuality is constructed through the reiteration of certain desires. For instance, in Bodies that Matter, Butler says that the performance of gender is "a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms" (95). She describes the process whereby these repetitions become norms:

This iterability implies that "performance" is not a singular "act" or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of production and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production... (95)

In Bodies that Matter, Butler is describing the establishment of heterosexual norms,

norms that would not sanction the kind of sexuality Ballard presents in Crash.

However, she also claims that these identifications are not stable and are thus dependent on such reiterations for their continued constitution:

Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability. They are that which is constantly marshaled, consolidated, retrenched, contested and, on occasion, compelled to give way. (105)

Therefore, while Butler is talking about the establishment of norms that are reiterations of normative heterosexuality, the possibility for establishing alternative norms also exists.

Normative heterosexuality is founded in the reiteration of the oedipal body, in the fear of castration and the taboo on homosexuality. As I will illustrate below, Ballard's Crash constructs a vision of sexuality that violates these central taboos of normative heterosexuality. However, Ballard's presentation of alternative versions of sexuality reiterates these new alternatives; thus, rather than serving as taboos, the "transgressive" sexual acts come to function as normative desires in the novel itself. In order to illustrate this, I will look first at the character of Vaughn and his relationship to the narrator. It is important to note that the "perversity" of Vaughn is not perceived by the other characters as abnormal; rather, his behavior sets the normative standard for sexuality in the novel.

In the passage which opens this chapter, the narrator, James Ballard,⁵⁶ describes the world of (auto)eroticism⁵⁷ that Vaughn opens up for him; that is, he describes Vaughn's personal version of desire. Many readers of the text, such as Sobchack, want to separate the "perversions" of Vaughn from those of the narrator. However, as Ballard makes clear in chapter two, the narrator does not need to be converted to Vaughn's philosophy. The narrator's own car crash initiates him into the erotic world, the (auto)erotic world of the car crash with which Vaughn is obsessed. In the first few moments after his accident, for instance, he is fascinated by the "extremes of pain and violence ritualized in the gesture" of Dr. Helen Remington's legs and the erotic conjunction of the vehicles and victims, including the body of Helen's dead husband:

The draped body of the dead man was lifted from the bonnet of the car. Seated like a demented madonna between the doors of the second ambulance, his wife gazed vacantly at the evening traffic....Already I was aware that the interlocked radiator grilles of our cars formed the model of an inescapable and perverse union between us. Across them the grey blanket formed a graceful dune. Somewhere beneath this mound lay the treasure of her pubis. Its precise jut and rake, the untouched sexuality of this intelligent woman, presided over the tragic

⁵⁶In order to avoid the confusion caused by the author and character sharing a name, from here forward, I will refer to the character Ballard as the "narrator."

⁵⁷This term not only indicates the connection of this eroticism to the automobile but reveals the solipsistic quality inherent in this particular erotic world.

events of the evening. (25)

This budding awareness of the sexualized nature of car crashes continues to grow while he is hospitalized, as the narrator explores the eroticism of his own wounds and ponders the erotic possibilities of the victims of an airplane crash--since he is hospitalized in a ward normally reserved for airplane crash survivors. Therefore, it is not, as some readers claim, that Vaughn draws the narrator into his world but, instead, that the narrator actually seeks him out. Vaughn becomes his teacher, schooling him in the best ways to practice his new interest in the kinaesthetics of car crashes. In fact, after his first meeting with Vaughn, he says that he "had already enlisted Vaughn in [his] confused hunt", thus illustrating that he is not just blindly following Vaughn but an active participant in their relationship (65). The narrator claims the key to understanding the "immense metalized landscape" that is his life is to be found "somewhere within these constant and unchanging traffic patterns" of the novel's landscape, the roadways around London's airport (65). The narrator seeks out Vaughn because he believes that Vaughn can help him interpret these patterns.

Perhaps one of the qualities of this novel which most disturbs readers is that Vaughn is not the only character in the novel who indulges in these perversions. Many of the characters, including Seagrave, Gabrielle, Helen Remington and Catherine, the narrator's wife, not only seem comfortable with Vaughn and his fantasies, crash-victim role-playing, and constructed sex scenes, but they are actually drawn to them. Only a few characters--Renata and Vera, Seagrave's wife--seem to find the strange requests, sexual desires, and actions of the narrator and Vaughn in

any way unusual or disturbing. Vera Seagrave, for instance, finally flees from Vaughn. Yet, this occurs not after the death of her husband in his final accident, an accident Seagrave staged in an attempt to create Vaughn's fantasy of the death of Elizabeth Taylor, but when Vaughn deliberately runs over and kills a pedestrian while Vera is in his car, an action that leads the police to begin looking for Vaughn. Therefore, it remains unclear whether Vera distances herself from Vaughn because of his perversity or because of the legal implications of being an accessory to vehicular homicide. In any case, these minor characters are the only ones in the text who seem to question the actions of Vaughn and the narrator⁵⁸; everyone else appears to share their fascination with the erotic possibilities of car crashes. In the hospital, the narrator's wife, for instance, seems to the narrator to find his accident a source for rekindling their erotic life, which for a long time has been dependent on their recounting of their various affairs as the fuel for their orgasms. She asks about the accident and the death of Helen Remington's husband, and the narrator says,

Did she respect, and perhaps even envy me for having killed someone, in almost the only way in which one can now legally take another person's life? Within the car crash death was directed by vectors of speed, violence and aggression. Did Catherine respond to the image of these which had been caught, like a photographic plate or the still from

⁵⁸Renata is disturbed by the narrator's purchase of a car identical to the one that was totalled in the accident, and she is somewhat bothered by the way he seems more interested in the erotics of automobiles than her body in their first love-making scene after his accident, which is discussed briefly below. However, Renata is a very minor character in the novel.

a newsreel, in the dark bruises of my body and the physical outline of the steering wheel? (45)

In the narrator's imagination, Catherine experiences the same kind of eroticized response that he has had to his accident; she sees in his bruises and bodily dents the erotic markings of a new version of desire, a version of desire for which her culture has prepared her. She has been "fed for years on a diet of aircraft disasters and war newsreels, of violence transmitted in darkened cinemas," so she makes "an immediate connection between [his] accident and the nightmare fatalities of the world perceived as part of her sexual recreations" (46). These characters accept Vaughn's fantasies, his understanding of desire, because these seem logical, merely an extension, and perhaps a rejuvenation, of their own previous erotic lives.

Ballard creates, then, within the text exactly the kind of reiteration necessary to construct a new version of sexuality. Even though this new version of sexuality may have its birth in the images of "nightmare fatalities" that are so every present in the media, it is nonetheless disturbing to many readers of the novel. The text is disturbing because within the world of the novel, Vaughn's fantasies are not only found to be acceptable, they become the norm. Vaughn, the narrator, and Seagrave, in particular, are all fascinated with recreating car crashes.

Vaughn, for instance, uses prostitutes and even the narrator's wife, Catherine, to reenact the car crashes he has photographed:

Often I watched him lingering over the photographs of crash fatalities, gazing at their burnt faces with a terrifying concern, as he calculated

the most elegant parameters of the fractured windshield and instrument assemblies. He would mimic these injuries in his own driving postures, turning the same dispassionate eyes on the young women he picked up near the airport. Using their bodies, he recapitulated the deformed anatomies of these girls against their shoulders, pressing their knees against his own chest, always curious to see their reactions. (145)

Recreating the positions of the car crash positions, Vaughn continually reiterates the codes of a new sexuality. The narrator is generally a voyeur in Vaughn's reiteration of the erotics of car crashes, but his own understanding of desire also repeats a similar pattern. He sees himself in a cyborgian relationship with his car, and he, too, defines a version of sexuality that is based on recalling the erotic possibilities of his own and others' accidents.

In Crash, Ballard refers to this new normative desire as the marriage of sex and technology. After his accident, the narrator becomes a cyborg; he imagines that his body is united with the automobile. When the narrator is once again able to drive, he immediately begins exploring this relationship. His first sexual act in a car after the accident illustrates the intertwining of his body with the car:

The aggressive stylization of this mass-produced cockpit, the exaggerated mouldings of the instrument binnacles emphasized my growing sense of a new junction between my own body and the automobile, closer than my feelings for Renata's broad hips and strong legs stowed out of sight beneath her red plastic raincoat. I leaned

forward, feeling the rim of the steering wheel against the scars on my chest, pressing my knees against the ignition switch and handbrake.

(55)

The interior of the car evokes erotic possibilities that his companion cannot. Later, when he has sex with Dr. Helen Remington, the widow of the man he has killed, they both discover a similar connection to the automobile. She watches him as he caresses the instrument panel of the car, and the "pressure of her thighs against the hot plastic formed a module of intense excitement" (72). Like the narrator, she seems driven to recreate the accident. The narrator experiences an orgasm as he drives back past the place where their accident happened and Helen's husband was killed; in fact, he reaches sexual climax as he drives over the glass fragments that remain on the road. Further, both the narrator and Helen have no sexual interest in one another unless they are in a car. The narrator tells us that their few attempts to have sex in other places fail; she is uninterested, and he is unable to perform. They need the car because the car is an indispensable part of their sexual acts: "The passenger compartment enclosed us like a machine generating from our sexual act an homunculus of blood, semen and engine coolant" (81). The narrator wants to merge with the automobile; he wants to experience the connection between his flesh and the metal and plastic of the car, and, therefore, he imagines that their sexual union goes beyond the mere mixing of human body fluids to include a kind of "techno-body" exchange of fluids where the "blood, semen and engine coolant" are all equally intermixed. This is a state that Vaughn seems already to have achieved, since he is

often described as smelling like a "blend of semen and engine coolant" (102).

The car crash expands the connection between humans and automobiles by reinventing the body of those who are injured and creating new areas for erotogenic pleasure. This is most clearly seen in Gabrielle, a woman who has been severely injured and permanently crippled by a car accident. The narrator witnesses Gabrielle's transformation after the accident through a series of photographs collected by Vaughn (just as Vaughn has collected photographs of the narrator's own accident and its aftermath). Looking at these pictures, the narrator becomes convinced that the accident has transformed Gabrielle from a young woman "whose symmetrical face and unstretched skin spelled out the whole economy of a cozy and passive life, of minor flirtations in the backs of cars enjoyed without any sense of the real possibilities of her body" into a woman who has come to understand all of the possibilities of her body (99). The last photograph of Gabrielle, showing her getting into her new car which has been modified for her disabilities, reveals her as having "been reborn within the breaking contours of her crushed sports car" into a confident woman fully aware of her own erotic possibilities (99). The narrator says of Gabrielle: "The deformed body of the crippled woman, like the deformed bodies of the crashed automobiles, revealed the possibilities of an entirely new sexuality" (102).

This new sexuality is also reflected in Vaughn's other photographs. His collection of car crash photos reveals the new erotic possibilities to be discovered in this cyborgian union between automobile and human being. The narrator describes these photographs of the injuries of accident victims as a kind of sexual manual or

pornographic picture book:⁵⁹

His photographs of sexual acts, of sections of automobile radiator grilles and instrument panels, conjunctions between elbow and chromium window-sill, vulva and instrument binnacle, summed up the possibilities of a new logic created by these multiplying artifacts, the codes of a new marriage of sensation and possibility. (106)

The narrator discovers these possibilities for himself when he finally has sex with Gabrielle. The narrator fantasizes about Gabrielle and the way she operates her specially modified car almost from their first meeting. Gabrielle is the closest to being a true cyborg in the text; her injuries have made the connection between technology and her body a necessity, since she is dependent on technology for the ability to move. She embodies the narrator's fantasy both because she is an invalid and because the design of her car perfectly reflects the merging of body with automobile that the narrator is always trying to capture in his fantasies:

All the while I stared at those parts of Gabrielle's body reflected in this nightmare technology of cripple controls. I watched her thighs under the strap of her spinal harness, the angular bowl of her pelvis, the hard

⁵⁹These photographs are actually used by the characters in this way. They become part of the characters' elaborate fantasies about car crashes and another way in which the reiteration of this new sexuality takes place. Vaughn has people answer a questionnaire that asks its participants to imagine car crashes in which famous people die and to describe how they would be injured (the car crash that kills Seagrave is an example of the attempt to create one of these fantasies). These pictures serve as a kind of guide to this exercise, as examples from which they might choose or upon which they might build even more outrageous possibilities for injuries.

pressure of her hand on my arm. She gazed back at me through the windshield, playing with the chromium clutch treadle as if hoping that something obscene might happen. (175)

He describes Gabrielle and her car as a "*tour de force* of technology and kinaesthetic systems" (178). When they have sex, he discovers that her accident has made her body into a wealth of new zones of pleasure.

Indeed, he finds that neither of them is much interested in conventional sexual acts. She is bored by his attention to her clitoris, and they both become aroused only when he begins to explore the marks on her body left by the accident. Rather than stroking her "pubis," he concentrates on the "scars on her thigh, feeling the tender causeways driven through her flesh by the handbrake of the car in which she had crashed" (178). She, in turn, explores his scars; then, they begin "deciphering together these codes of a sexuality made possible by our two car-crashes" (179). He climaxes not through vaginal intercourse but "within the deep wound on her thigh," and he continues to discover new sexual pleasures as he explores the new vaginations created as a result of her accident (179). The coupling of machine and organism that occurs between the narrator and Gabrielle and her car represents the "new kind of sexuality emerging from the technological transformation of the body into an eroticized surface capable of merging at any point with other artifacts" that N. Katherine Hayles sees in the text (322). In fact, the narrator anxiously awaits what he imagines is his own wife's accident because this would be the "one event which would release the codes waiting within her" (180).

However, the nature of this new sexuality remains in question. What kind of sexuality is being reiterated by Vaughn and the narrator? The scenes between Vaughn and the various women he picks up, including Catherine, reflect the kind of objectification that Sobchack finds problematic and disturbing (327). These young women function only as puzzle pieces in the construction of his erotic fantasies; as the quote from the narrator discussed previously illustrates, Vaughn uses their bodies to recapitulate the "deformed anatomies" of car crash victims. In addition, the narrator also tends to view women, even his own wife, as objects within his own fantasy world; he is not concerned so much with their reactions and responses as with manipulating them into enacting his particular fantasies. Therefore, Crash can hardly be seen as presenting a new kind of sexuality that most feminist readers would find desirable.

Recent feminist readings of cyberpunk have revealed a similar dilemma. Current feminist discussions of cyberpunk mirror the major issues in the debate between Sobchack and Baudrillard. On the one hand, the liberation of sexuality is particularly important to feminist readers and writers, but, on the other hand, it is difficult to evaluate (and/or celebrate) many of the visions of liberation presented in cyberpunk because they offer little or no progress in terms of the material reality of women. For instance, writers such as Sharon Stockton, in "'The Self-Regained': Cyberpunk's Retreat to the Imperium," have claimed that cyberpunk often seems to

merely repeat patriarchal and capitalist structures.⁶⁰ Stockton believes that there is little room for recreating gender positions in cyberpunk, and she concludes her essay with the following claim:

Pushed to the margins of representation in cyberpunk is the always secondary status of the 'self-regained'--secondary to the circulation of capital and the 'dance of biz.' The "mater"/matter of cyberspace is not virgin territory; it is not "territory" at all; what it provides is merely the illusion of penetrable depth wherein we might imagine the violent (re)establishment of entrepreneurial identity. (611)

Stockton believes, in short, that cyberpunk "does not go" as far as its advocates would claim in undermining and challenging capitalistic and patriarchal structures.⁶¹

Mary Catherine Harper in "Incurably Alien Other: A Case for Feminist Cyborg Writers," agrees that heterosexual norms are still very dominant in science fiction in general and cyberpunk in particular; however, she believes that while it may often reflect patriarchal norms, cyberpunk, nevertheless, has the potential to "suggest

⁶⁰My definition of Crash as cyberpunk may seem a bit unusual, since cyberpunk is often associated with cyberspace. However, as I have already discussed above, I believe that the characters in this novel have a cyborgian relationship with their cars, and cyberpunk is defined by the exploration of the integration of machine and organism. This is most obvious in the case of computer cyborgs, but it is also apparent in the mechanized bodies of Burroughs and Ballard.

⁶¹She reads the "cyberhero[es]" of writers such as Gibson as very much representatives of "traditional Western masculinity" (593). Further, she claims that even writers such as Acker, whom Brian McHale sees as rewriting Gibson's character Case from Neuromancer in her novel Empire of the Senseless, fail to escape from this traditional masculinity (603-604).

the possibility of liberation from the constraints of such oppositional categories as masculinist rationality and feminized 'meat'" (401).⁶² Unlike Stockton, Harper believes that cyberpunk can reveal and even critique patriarchal structures, even though many writers, male writers in particular, merely repeat those structures. I agree with Harper's claim; however Stockton's essay raises important questions which cannot be ignored. It is important, then, not just to assume that cyborgs and cyberspace allow for the destruction of boundaries but to explore how cyborgs and cyberspace reveal, reflect, or even critique those boundaries.

Karen Cadora, in "Feminist Cyberpunk," offers insight into one of the ways she believes cyborgs can provide a critique of the patriarchal structures of gender identity; she claims that cyberpunk challenges essentialist understandings of female gender identity. She says,

There is no essential 'woman' in feminist cyberpunk. In fact, the

⁶²She says of cyborgs that they "are hybrids of science and potentially transgressive cultural critique" (406). Harper believes that despite the fact that much cyberpunk may repeat what Stockton sees as "traditional Western masculinity," the cyborg, nonetheless, can be used to challenge this tradition effectively. She explores several contemporary works, such as Pat Cadigan's "Rock On" and Misha's Red Spider White Web, which she considers to be "self-critical feminist readings" that provide an important cultural critique. Harper relies heavily on Haraway's concept of the cyborg to explain her readings (407). She claims that

Haraway's cyborg celebrates and participates fully in a socially constructed body, self-knowingly marked and maintained by science, medical technology, and global business practices, especially in the information management field, and current media images. (405)

The cyborg has the ability to evolve, to be "self-reflexively transmogrified," because although it is "produced within a capitalist framework," it is also able to tell the story of this production and is "willfully controlling and sometimes destroying its environment" (407).

blurrings of human-machine-animal and reality-fantasy means that there is no identity that is essentially or uniquely 'human'" (370).⁶³

Cyborgs, she claims, allow women to have "a fractured identity and still function in a high-tech world" (370). They reveal that both identity and desire are denaturalized.

Haraway says that "postmodernist strategies" like her

cyborg myth, subvert the myriad organic wholes (e.g., the poem, the primitive culture, the biological organism. In short, the certainty of what counts as nature--a source of insight and a promise of innocence--is undermined, probably fatally. The transcendent authorization of interpretation is lost and with it the ontology grounding Western epistemology. But the alternative is not cynicism or faithlessness, that is, some version of abstract existence, like the accounts of technological determinism destroying 'man' by the 'machine' or 'meaningful political action' by the 'text.' Who cyborgs will be is a radical question; the answers are a matter of survival. (194-95)

The cyborg, like Butler's concept of "subversive repetition," does not, then, promise a particular outcome. Neither concept offers an end that is clearly articulated. For Butler, utopian fantasies are unworkable and impracticable because they reinstate that nature/culture (technology) dualism which needs to be undone rather than

⁶³Like Butler, she believes that identity politics have negatively affected the ability of feminists to achieve their political goals and that "[f]eminism has been slow to let go of the subject of 'woman' because letting go of that term means letting go of the politics of unity" (370).

reconstructed. Butler's understanding of transgression and Haraway's concept of the cyborg themselves do not promise that the possibilities for desire opened up by their critiques will necessarily be more satisfactory than the norms currently sanctioned. Instead, they offer only the possibility for critique and the opportunity to rewrite those sanctions.

In Bodies that Matter, Butler asks what would happen if the "taboo becomes eroticized," and Crash creates just such a scenario. As Butler points out in Chapter Three of that work, "Phantasmatic Identification and the Assumption of Sex," normative heterosexuality is based on the repetition of certain restraints which construct sexuality; we are

constrained by not only what is difficult to imagine, but what remains radically unthinkable: in the domain of sexuality these constraints include the radical unthinkability of desiring otherwise, the radical unendurability of desiring otherwise, the absence of certain desires, the repetitive compulsion of others, the abiding repudiation of some sexual possibilities, panic, obsessional pull, and the nexus of sexuality and pain. (94)

Crash rewrites this nexus; it reimagines what is unthinkable and repudiated by normative heterosexuality. The primary prohibition in normative heterosexuality is the prohibition against homosexuality, and Crash not only violates this prohibition, but the homosexual desire of the narrator for Vaughn is treated as just another version of the same (auto)erotic desire played out in the rest of the novel. The narrator is

drawn to Vaughn because he so clearly understands the eroticization of the automobile that the narrator is experiencing. As Vaughn's voyeuristic chauffeur, the narrator is able to witness Vaughn's uncanny ability to recreate the erotic positioning of accident victims about which he himself fantasizes. He finds in Vaughn's reflection in all the instrument panels and mirrors of the car a perfect manifestation of his own fantasies, and, for this reason, Vaughn becomes the central fixation of his own desire. Yet, Ballard's presentation of their sexual encounter, with its descriptions of the sexual act as a cyborgian connection with the automobile makes it no different from any of the other sexual acts presented in the text; it repeats the same associations. The fantasy of Vaughn evoked when he visits the narrator's office, decorated with the pictures of various automobile parts on the walls, illustrates this:

I stared down between his buttocks, wishing that these display photographs of car fenders and windshield sections could form themselves into a complete automobile, in which I could take his body in my hands, like that of some vagrant dog, and anneal its wounds within this arcade of possibilities. I visualized these sections of radiator grilles and instrument panels coalescing around Vaughn and myself, embracing us as I pulled down his jeans, celebrating in the penetration of his rectum the most beautiful contours of a rear-fender assembly, a marriage of my penis with all the possibilities of a benevolent technology. (148)

When the narrator and Vaughn do act out his fantasy, the narrator finally feels calm;

this calm comes not only from his "love for Vaughn" but his "feelings of tenderness towards the metal bower in which we sat" (202). The intertwining of the metal body of the car with the bodies of human beings helps to make this act just another example of the fantasy role-playing that the characters, the narrator and Vaughn in particular, have engaged in throughout the novel.

Another way in which the novel challenges the repudiation of certain sexual possibilities comes in its presentation of castration. As Butler notes, the fear of castration is central to the construction of a normative heterosexuality; "Castration is the figure for punishment" that institutes sexed positioning and sanctions "heterosexual positioning" (*Bodies that Matter* 96). However, in *Crash*, castration is not seen as a figure for punishment but, rather, is celebrated along with other genital injuries as an erotic event. Vaughn's penis, for instance, is scarred due to an accident; yet, this does not evoke the threat of castration and instead comes to signify the erotic marking of an accident, much as Gabrielle's scars do. Vaughn's photographs reveal his fascination with genital wounds of all kinds, and his questionnaires reflect the other characters' fascination with these as well. Seagrave, for instance, imagines all the potential accident victims in his questionnaire as having genital wounds, and he attempts to come up with new possibilities for these wounds. The possibility of castration, then, holds no fear, even for the male narrator, because as his encounter with Gabrielle illustrates, the scars that mark the victims' wounds have become new sites for erotogenic pleasure.

These new sites for erotogenic pleasure, then, contradict the norms reiterated

in heterosexuality. In the world of Crash, the taboo against homosexuality and the threat of castration are no longer viable constructs; instead, they have been incorporated into the normative desire of the text. In this way, the text is a radical reconstruction of gender and sexual identity. However, while a Butlerian reading of the presentation of desire in the text reveals the way desire is constructed in the text and offers an alternative site for erotogenic pleasure, it does not provide an answer to those who will question if these sites present a "positive" alternative to normative heterosexuality. Indeed, the solipsistic quality of the desire presented in the text means that the people who are enlisted or manipulated into participating in either Vaughn or the narrator's fantasies are inevitably objectified. While Ballard does not repeat patriarchal structures, his version of desire does repeat the problem of objectification; however, objectification here is not determined by gender roles but by an individual's position within the sexual dynamic of the novel--both men and women may be objectified if they are not in control of the fantasy.

Crash not only reveals an alternative version of sexuality, but it also reveals the ambiguities inherent in Butler's theory. As I mentioned above, neither Butler's nor Haraway's theories promise a humanist version of liberation; Butler, in fact, does not promise that these alternative sites will be liberatory at all.⁶⁴ Yet, for the

⁶⁴This is the most difficult aspect of doing a Butlerian reading because even Butler herself seems currently to be trying to find a way to articulate some kind of standards for assuring that the alternatives created are productive rather than destructive or merely new versions that end up repeating similar structures of dominance and oppression. At this point, however, this ambiguity is a necessary risk of applying a Butlerian theory.

purposes of reading the transgressive elements of this text and exploring the kind of gender and sexual critique provided by this transgression, Butler nevertheless remains a more productive source for understanding the novel. The two primary ways of reading the novel, as either a celebration of a new version of sexuality or as a cautionary warning against that new version of desire, do not provide significant insight into the novel. Sobchack, for instance, with her humanist expectations about desire, returns to an understanding of desire not unlike that which I discussed in Chapter One. She sees transgression in the text as force that empowers the taboo; it is almost a return to the Judeo-Christian understanding of transgression wherein the power of transgression lies in its ability to reinforce rather than violate boundaries. Baudrillard, on the other hand, by celebrating the desire in the text, makes the same move as many ecstatic readings of transgression; he grants the transgression in the text the power to disrupt all boundaries. However, as the questions about the novel raised by writers such as Sobchack and the responses to his essay reveal, this is an oversimplistic ("naive") response to the novel. As Butler makes clear, desire is not a natural force that has such power. It is an artificial construct that can be used to reinforce as well as to rewrite normative structures.

In Chapter Fourteen, the narrator claims that the "deviant technology of the car-crash provided the sanction for any perverse act" (138). Such a sanctioning of any perverse act, does not, as Baudrillard claims, create a version of transgression that is so powerful as to paradoxically make transgression itself unnecessary, yet it also does more than just merely serve to reinforce taboos against such desires; it

provides valuable insights into the way sexuality is constructed. Ballard's eroticization of the car crash illustrates the way that the reiteration of sexual norms, no matter how "perverse," can alter what is considered normative sexuality. In doing this, it provides a challenge to the taboos which construct this sexuality; it reveals that not only are they not natural but that through reiteration any act can come to be not just sanctioned but celebrated, even if that act finds its ultimate manifestation in death. Butler provides us with no standards with which to evaluate this new version of sexuality, but she does provide us with a theoretical framework for exploring this new version of desire and its commentary of the construction of desire as well.

CHAPTER SIX

"I don't find myself at all": The Troubling of Gender in Angela Carter's The Passion of New Eve

And more than my body, some other yet equally essential part of my being was ravaged by him for, when he mounted me with his single eye blazing like the mouth of an automatic, his little body imperfectly stripped, I felt myself to be, not myself but he; and the experience of this crucial lack of self, which always brought with it a shock of introspection, forced me to know myself as a former violator at the moment of my own violation. When he entered me, the act seemed to me one of seppuku, a ritual disembowelment I committed upon myself, although I was only watching him and only felt my pain and unpleasure at my distress.

Angela Carter, The Passion of New Eve

In his obituary for Angela Carter, "Angela Carter, 1940-92: A Very Good Wizard, A Very Dear Friend," Salman Rushdie claims that Carter's death will likely result in her finally receiving the kind of recognition her work deserves, a recognition that was never quite achieved in her lifetime "in spite of her worldwide reputation":

. . .for some reason she was not placed where she belonged--at the center of the literature of her time, at the heart. Now that she's dead, I have no doubt that the size of her achievement will rapidly become plain. (5)

However, while Carter's death from cancer in 1992 has granted her her "place in the pantheon" to some degree, those same artistic qualities that kept her out of the place "where she belonged" during her lifetime continue to haunt critical responses to her

work (5). Rushdie refers to Carter as the "high-sorceress" of English Literature, a "benevolent witch queen, a burlesque artist of genius and antic grace," and these terms help make clear why Carter defies the description and categorization needed to make her full canonization possible (5). Critics of Carter agree that her works are filled with transgressive elements, but her style and subject matter make the politics of her use of transgression less clear to critics.⁶⁵ I want to look briefly at two essays critical of Carter to illustrate the difficult nature of coming to terms with the "genius and antic grace" of her work. Robert Clark's 1987 essay "Angela Carter's Desire Machines" is one of the earliest scholarly articles on Carter's work, and John Bayley's "Fighting for the Crown" was published in April of 1992 after her death; yet, the pairing of these pieces makes clear how easily Carter's work can be misunderstood when interpreted through conventional, and often rigid, schemas for determining what constitutes feminist fiction and what may be considered subversive.

Clark's article, that I will look at in more depth below, claims that Carter's works fail as feminist texts because she "unwittingly" supports "masculinist assumptions" about desire and rape (152). He believes that her novels provide no "alternative" feminist site, and, therefore, the transgressive elements of her work merely repeat patriarchal structures rather than challenging them (159). Bayley, on

⁶⁵The role of transgression in the canonization of postmodern fiction is rather ironic; transgressive elements, the violation of boundaries--whether they be in the area of sexuality or genre, have become one of the standards for establishing the postmodern "canon." However, the same transgressive elements may be so disturbing to some readers, as is the case with Acker, Ballard, and Carter, as to complicate their canonization. I recognize the irony of even having a postmodern canon, but it is clearly being negotiated and established at this time.

the other hand, finds that, ultimately, all of Carter's works stick to a feminist "party line"; he claims, "whatever spirited arabesques and feats of descriptive imagination Carter may perform she always comes to rest in the right ideological position" (9). For Bayley, Carter's work is almost a prescription for young women to follow, a kind of fictionalized representation of the "politically correct" position for women to occupy today. To each of these critics, Carter follows a prescribed "party line": either she is unwittingly reinforcing the patriarchal party line or she is staunchly dictating a "politically correct" feminist party line. The complexity and ambiguity of Carter's work makes two such opposed perspectives possible, but each is an oversimplification of her works, dependent on a selective reading of details.⁶⁶ The fact that Carter's work can be read as espousing two such totally opposed positions reveals that her fiction is much more complex than either of these writers is willing to grant.

Hermione Lee makes this clear in "Angela Carter's Profane Pleasures," a critique of Bayley's essay. As she points out, Carter defined herself as a feminist and her works are undoubtedly political, but to reduce her work to a political prescription of any kind is to ignore her own dislike for any rigid form of authority. Lee says, such "arguments have nothing to do with Angela Carter," who disliked "the

⁶⁶Clark, for instance, fails to mention that in The Passion of New Eve, which I will discuss below, Eve has been surgically altered and once was a man until late in his essay, after he has already discussed the rape of Eve by Zero as "literary sensationalism," and Bayley oversimplifies his descriptions of the "Carter girls" by removing these descriptions of the characters from the complex context of the stories.

'sanctimonious' and was a 'defiler of sacred cows'" (5-6).⁶⁷ Indeed, Carter's work defies easy categorization. She declares herself a feminist; yet, her works contain numerous rapes, episodes in which women are degraded, parodies of the maternal, possible incestuous relationships, and scenes evoking the work of Sade. Such scenes have led writers, like Clark, to question Carter's feminist perspective. However, in The Sadeian Woman, Carter makes clear her belief that such scenes are necessary if we are to explore the construction of gender in our society; she claims that art that portrays the "erotic violence committed by men upon women" will be condemned because "[p]erhaps it reveals too clearly that violence has always been the method by which institutions demonstrate their superiority" (23). Carter believes that these types of images, of art, can be used to critique gender relations; they may be the tools of a "moral pornographer"⁶⁸:

The moral pornographer would be an artist who uses pornographic material as part of the acceptance of the logic of a world of absolute sexual license for all genders, and projects a model of the way such a

⁶⁷Lee's critique provides strong support for her argument that Bayley comes to "bury Angela Carter, not to praise her" by applying the term "pc" to her works (5).

⁶⁸As Nanette Altevors makes clear in "Gender Matters in The Sadeian Woman," this is probably the most "contested" term in the critical responses to Carter's work (18). Carter, in a 1988 interview with Anna Katsavos, says that this "was the phrase that got me into a lot of trouble with the sisters, some of the sisters" (16). However, Carter explains her use of the term by saying that the problem is that it "is not very pleasant for women to find out about how they are represented in the world," but that "[t]hey find out much more about what their real existential status is from pornography" (16). This revelation may be "unpleasant," but it is necessary if the demystification she advocates (see below) is to be possible.

world might work. A moral pornographer might use pornography as a critique of current relations between the sexes. His business would be the total demystification of the flesh and the subsequent revelation, through the infinite modulations of the sexual act, of the real relations of man and his kind. (The Sadeian Woman 19).

Like the art she describes, Carter's work "cuts too close to the bone," but that is what she intends (The Sadeian Woman 22). The "total demystification of the flesh" and the "revelation" that such a demystification allows may not be accomplished without a bit of discomfort. The political critique in her work comes not from presenting readers with some "pc" representation of the "Carter girl," the new woman, as Bayley contends, but in challenging and disrupting our understandings of gender relations by presenting and revealing the complexity and ambiguity in their constructions.

Butler, in the conclusion of Gender Trouble, describes the kind of critical positioning that she sees as necessary in order for feminism to challenge patriarchal structures; she says,

[t]he critical task for feminism is not to establish a point of view outside of the construction of an epistemological model that would disavow its own cultural location and, hence, promote itself as a global subject, a position that deploys precisely the imperialist strategies that feminism ought to criticize. The critical task is rather to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm local possibilities of intervention through participating in

typical of the response of many readers of the novel; although fascinated by Carter's work, she says "I had not liked [the novel]: nor had reading her other novels and stories resolved this ambiguity of response" (34). In her essay, Bono explores the nature of her resistance to the novel and discovers that the novel is fascinating for the way it produces such a reaction. She says,

Rejections, like pleasures, are symptoms; refusals ask to be brought into the open when they would seek concealment, and to be investigated when they reveal themselves. Re-reading, I have been forced to examine in a different light my attitudes towards pornography and maternity, sexuality and representation, identity and subjectivity. I do not know that I can now say that I "like" the Passion; perhaps some of the mixture of fascination and repulsion still lingers, perhaps my journey is not over. (45)

For Bono the pleasure of this novel comes from examining her own resistance to it. Although I am one of those readers who has always "liked" the novel, I, too, am fascinated by the resistance many readers have to it, as well as by the number of responses to the work which acknowledge that it offers a provocative look at such central feminist issues as pornography, maternity, sexuality, and so forth and yet find the novel difficult to like.

Elaine Jordon, in "The Dangerous Edge" prints a portion of a letter wherein Carter calls the novel "my favourite of my novels because it is so ambitious, so serious and so helplessly flawed" (213). Carter claims that she intended to write the

precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity, and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them. (147)

Carter's The Passion of New Eve, published in 1977⁶⁹, offers one such "subversive repetition," and her narrative presentation of the (re)construction of gender identities illustrates the troubling of categories of gender that Butler advocates. Rather than merely repeating masculinist assumptions, Carter exposes those assumptions and opens up possibilities for challenging them. She claims, "Flesh comes to us out of history; so does the repression and taboo that governs our experience of flesh" (The Sadeian Woman 11). Carter's fiction explores the nature of transgression and taboo by looking at that history of the flesh in fantastical and unique ways. Rather than positing alternative positions that exist outside of contemporary structures of power, she creates fantastical worlds that reveal the flesh of our own time and space.

Of all her novels, The Passion of New Eve is the one that makes readers the most uncomfortable. Although many readers find its themes provocative, it is a work a number of her readers find difficult to like.⁷⁰ Paola Bono's "The Passion for Sexual Difference: On (Re)Reading Angela Carter's The Passion of New Eve" is

⁶⁹The novel was originally published by Victor Gollancz in 1977; however, the page numbers used in this text refer to the 1982 Virago Press printing of the novel.

⁷⁰For instance, Nicole Ward Jouve, in "Mother Is a Figure of Speech. . ." says of the novel, "The--bloodlessness?--with which a ghastly series of Doomsday horrors were being narrated fazed me" (142). After her son reads the book and tells her "It defeated every pornographic expectation from its male readers," she admits that she knew she had "missed the point" of the novel (143). Her response is typical, however, because although she comes to understand that there is an important critique of gender and sexuality going on in the novel, she cannot quite come to like the novel itself.

novel exploring "myth with a capital M" yet found "Myth bored [her]" and the novel became something else instead--an exploration of myths, particularly about gender and sexuality.⁷¹ What fascinates readers of the novel, even those like Bono who find the novel somewhat "nauseating," is this exploration, the way that Carter interrogates those myths that construct our gendered identities. Ricarda Schmidt, in "The Journey of the Subject in Angela Carter's Fiction," claims that the novel has as its focus the "symbols of femininity" and provides insight into the "functioning" of these symbols (62-63). Schmidt points out that "the novel deconstructs the conception of the self as an essence and has explored the constitution of the subject in patriarchal society as mediated by the symbols of femininity men have created" (67). In order to understand how the novel accomplishes this deconstruction, the transgressive elements of the text and their relationship to gender identity must be explored more fully. Butler's theories about the subversion of gender identity, which I have discussed throughout this text, help to clarify the transgressive potential of this novel.

From the beginning moments of the text, Carter explores what Butler refers to

⁷¹Speaking about myths in her interview with Katsavos, Carter claims that she is not interested so much in myth as in "trying to figure out what certain configurations mean, underneath the kind of semi-religious coating that makes people not particularly want to interfere with them" (12). She claims that while early in her career she was interested in using myth, by the time of the interview, 1988, she had realized that even those early usages were more about exploring myths and their artificiality than anything else. She cites the use of Leda and the swan in The Magic Toyshop as an example, saying, "I wrote that a very long time ago, when I really didn't know what I was doing, and even so it turns out that the swan is an artificial construct, a puppet, and, somebody, a man, is putting strings on the puppet" (12). Carter's interest in exploring myth and, in particular, its relation to gender identity is a key element in The Passion of New Eve.

as the "practices" which "constitute identity" and reveals possibilities for contesting them by exposing their non-foundational, their constructed, nature. The opening lines of the novel clearly delineate the gender of the narrator as male, as well as simultaneously introducing the dominant female image in the text, Tristessa de St. Ange, who was once billed as the "most beautiful woman in the world." These lines, written at some unspecified moment beyond the events in the text, attempt to recapture the less conflicted gender position Evelyn occupies before he embarks on his journey to America, the position of a chauvinistic male: "The last night I spent in London, I took some girl or other to the movies, and through her mediation, I paid you a little tribute of spermatozoa, Tristessa" (5). This unnamed girl serves as the sight for the recuperation of his pubescent desire for Tristessa. Although the unnamed girl weeps because he is leaving for America, Evelyn sees her only as a receptacle for his "tribute" to the perfect reflection of phallic desire, the celluloid queen of suffering, Tristessa.

Even before the complex nature of the gendering of the two main characters, Eve/lyn and Tristessa, is revealed, then, Carter illustrates the constructed nature of gender identity through the contrasting response of Evelyn to the real woman who accompanies him to the theater and the celluloid image of Tristessa on the screen. He is irritated by the emotional attachment of this young woman, whose name he cannot recall, when she interrupts the playing out of his fantasy by crying: "But then I heard this otherwise forgotten girl murmur my name, 'Evelyn' and to my surprise, to my furious embarrassment, I discovered she was crying for I felt her tears leak on to my

knees" (9). Her tears invade and disrupt his reliving of his pre-pubescent desires for Tristessa, as well as his erotized remembering of his slightly sado-masochistic relationship with his nanny, who initiated his sexual response to Tristessa by taking him to the theater to see her films; they force him to remember that this "girl" is not merely an instrument of his desire but a living human being.⁷²

Tristessa, described by the narrator as a "piece of pure mystification" and the "most haunting of paradoxes," cinematic heroine of Wuthering Heights and The Fall of the House of Usher, is the ideal of femaleness for the narrator because she is all image. She is the perfect vision of the virtuous, beautiful, suffering woman. She is

⁷²As the opening chapters of the novel show, the narrator is unable to deal with women as human beings; he is most comfortable with women who, like Tristessa, are nothing but images. In fact, the only relationship detailed in the novel when the narrator is still a male is that with Leilah, a woman whom he perceives as existing most vividly as an image, an image in the mirror which finds its existence through his watching:

To watch her dressing herself, putting on her public face, was to witness an inversion of the ritual disrobing to which she would later submit her body for, the more clothed she became, the more vivid became my memory of her nakedness and, as she watched me watching the assemblage of all the paraphernalia that only emphasized the black plush flanks and crimson slit beneath it, so she, too, seemed to abandon her self in the mirror, to abandon her self to the mirror, and allowed herself to function only as a fiction of the erotic dream into which the mirror cast me. (30)

When she is merely an image in the mirror, she is an erotic object, and his desire for her is overwhelming. In fact, these moments seem to evoke his initial desire for her, which itself existed in the realm of the fantastical, since their erotic game through the city places them outside of the dangerous reality that is New York in the novel. However, when a pregnancy threatens to disrupt the illusion, Evelyn's cruelty to those who disrupt his fantasies is seen again, and he forces her to have an abortion and escapes from the city while she is hospitalized, leaving her sterilized due to an infection contracted as a result of the procedure.

Carter's version of Sade's Justine. In the Sadeian Woman, Carter describes the parallels between Justine and such cinematic heroines:

In the celluloid brothel of the cinema, where merchandise may be eyed endlessly but never purchased, the tension between the beauty of women, which is admirable, and the denial of sexuality which is the source of that beauty but is also immoral, reaches a perfect impasse. That is why Saint Justine became the patroness of the screen heroine. (60)⁷³

Like Justine, Tristessa is the image of a woman who finds a "sense of being through suffering" (The Sadeian Woman 75). For the narrator, Tristessa once represented the perfect reflection of his own phallic desire. Carter illustrates this by having the narrator's desire experienced as a "tribute of spermatozoa" which is mediated through "some girl" (5). Tristessa does not disrupt the narrator's experience of his desire because she remains in the realm of images. Yet, when it is revealed late in the text that Tristessa is male, the radical discontinuity between the conscious construction of

⁷³Unlike her sister Juliette, who finds power and profit in sin, Justine tries to remain moral despite being in a situation (she is female and alone) that⁷³ makes her extremely vulnerable; yet, instead of being rewarded for her virtue, she is raped and humiliated time and again. Despite the fact that she has done nothing wrong, she is continually punished and comes to embody a kind of pure suffering--which is reflected in the roles Tristessa plays in films. The final insult is that just when she seems to have found some hope for peace, she is killed in a freak accident; she is struck by lightning while closing a window. According to Carter, Justine is a prototype for a new kind of screen heroine who "[w]hen she suffers" knows "she exists." (The Sadeian Woman 75).

her gender and the biology of his/her body is exposed.⁷⁴ Through her creation of Tristessa as the ideal image of the feminine position--the site of lack, the perfect reflector of the phallic position, Carter parodies the performance of a female gender identity and thus challenges the foundational basis for such an identity.

As I mentioned in my introduction, Linda Hutcheon in The Politics of Postmodernism attempts to answer those critics of postmodernism who claim that postmodernism provides no opportunity for social or political critique. She advocates an understanding of postmodernism that recognizes that it both critiques and reflects the dominant ideology. This version of postmodernism, she explains, is

. . . my own paradoxical postmodernism of complicity and critique, of reflexivity and historicity, that at once inscribes and subverts the conventions and ideologies of the dominant cultural and social forces of the twentieth-century western world. (11)

The character of Tristessa embodies such a paradox; her image is clearly constructed by the "dominant cultural and social forces," but since this image is inscribed upon a body which is biologically male, Carter is also able to subvert the very conventions which Tristessa so perfectly represents. As Butler points out in Gender Trouble, in

⁷⁴The irony of Tristessa is further compounded by her surname, de St. Ange, which as Schmidt notes, is "the name of the woman who introduces the young virgin Eugenie" in Sade's Philosophy in the Bedroom. This is ironic because Madame de Saint-Ange is not a Justine figure but is, instead, more like Sade's Juliette. Nonetheless, Madame de Saint-Ange is Eugenie's teacher, and Tristessa, as I will discuss below, becomes an instrument in the attempt of Mother to teach Eve/lyn how to be a woman. In this case, however, the lesson is not in various methods of giving pleasure but in the art of suffering.

the phallic economy of Lacan, "women must become, must 'be' (in the sense of 'posture as if they were') precisely what men are not and, in their very lack, establish the essential function of men" (45). Tristessa is the ideal reflection of masculine power; she is the cinematic representation of the inscription of the lack which is the feminine position. Yet, ironically, when Tristessa's biological gender is revealed to be male, Evelyn claims that the reason s/he has been so successful at creating such a perfect image of the feminine is that s/he has "made himself the shrine of his own desires" (128). It is because he is biologically male that Tristessa can so perfectly reflect the feminine position, since this position is inscribed upon the female body through the masculine gaze. Throughout the text, Carter carefully places Tristessa as the central image of the ideal reflection of male desire; in fact, she even serves as one of the primary images of womanhood which are displayed as a part of the attempt to (re)construct Eve's gender identity.⁷⁵

This image of womanhood is countered by the community of Beulah. This community of women, whose entrance lies hidden under a "pompous" granite rendering of its symbol--"a stone cock with testicles, all complete" but "broken off clean in the middle," is led by a woman who has turned herself into a Mother

⁷⁵While in New York, Tristessa's "magic face" appears on post-midnight television and even on a movie theater sign ("a revival of Emma Bovary"), which reveals the parallel between her and his exotic lover Leilah, who Schmidt says "transforms herself into "that symbol of woman that the male gaze shows her. . . woman as meat" (62). Yet, it is only after Evelyn leaves New York that Tristessa's image once again becomes central to the narrative. Still, for most of the novel, it is not the real Tristessa who haunts the novel but her image and the way this image functions in the imagination of both the narrator and the characters whom s/he comes into contact throughout his/her journey across America.

Goddess. Mother, the Grand Emasculator, constructs her community on an essentialized version of the feminine: "Mother has made symbolism a concrete fact" (58). However, Carter uses this community to illustrate that such versions of the feminine are no less a reflection of male desire than is Tristessa. As Schmidt points out, Beulah "recalls Bunyan's country 'upon the borders of heaven' from which the pilgrims pass on to eternal life, and Blake's 'daughters of Beulah'" who "exist only in relation to the male, for the male, and in man's imagination" (62).⁷⁶ These associations of the term help to draw attention to the ways in which this all-female community has been created according to masculine ideals of femininity and the maternal. In this case, this masculine ideal of femininity has become exaggerated and horrific. Mother has become an artificial version of the maternal. Like an artist, Mother has sculpted her own body into a creation that is meant to reflect "pure nature," but the effect is a grotesque parody of nature:

She was fully clothed in obscene nakedness; she was breasted like a sow--she possessed two tiers of nipples, the result (Sophia would tell me, to my squeamish horror) of a strenuous programme of grafting, so that she could suckle four babies at one time. . . . I was exiled from

⁷⁶Naming this community of women after the biblical name for "the married land" allows Carter to emphasize the problem of trying to reappropriate myths. Mother and the women of Beulah want to construct their own society, a society free from the patriarchal structures that exist outside their sanctuary; however, their new "Eve" is a man. Their attempts to create an ideal community based on an essentialized understanding of femininity means reconstructing both bodies and myths to make them represent the ideal, the "pure nature," they seek. But both the bodies and the myths they try to reconstruct contain previous constructions of gender that retain the very patriarchal structures they are trying to rewrite.

Nirvana forever, and, faced with the concrete essence of woman, I was at my wit's end how to behave. I could not imagine what giant being might couple with her; she was a piece of pure nature, she was earth, she was fructification. (59-60)

There is nothing natural about Mother; her gigantic femininity is as constructed as the breasts grafted to her chest. The rituals of Beulah call upon Mother Earth for their validation, but these primitive ceremonies only mask the technology that makes this community possible. Schmidt also claims that Beulah is "the imaginary place of the ideal patriarchal marriage, both in Bunyan and in Blake" (62).⁷⁷ However, Harriet Blodgett makes clear that Carter is only playing on these mythic understandings of Beulah:

Technologically advanced, antiphallocentric Beulah. . . is no Blakean earthly paradise but rather Carter's parody of female science-fiction-cum-fertility myth, seasoned with a dash of Freudian Oedipal myth and Lacanian power symbols. Beulah exists not only in male nightmare but also in feminist utopian fantasy, of which Carter is skeptical. (50)

The marriage that is advocated in this "Beulah" does not belong to the mythic realm evoked by Bunyan and Blake but is a parodic union between Eve/lyn's former self and his new body. This community of women plans to create its own Eve, but she will be both father and mother to her own child. Carter's skepticism toward this

⁷⁷Schmidt is oversimplifying Blake's conception of paradise here. For Blake, paradise would actually transcend marriage. However, as Nancy Goslee points out, Blake's conception of the transcendent state may also eliminate women.

attempt to reconstruct myth into a feminist utopian fantasy can be seen in Eve(lyn)'s response to her role in this drama.

Following the surgical (re)construction that transforms him into a woman, Evelyn is asked by Mother, the Grand Emasculator, "How do you find yourself?" Evelyn's response, "I don't find myself at all," reveals the disparity between his body, a body which has been recreated with all the markers necessary to define him as a "natural" woman, and his actual gender position as a male. While the image in the mirror reveals to Evelyn that he is a woman--in fact, the perfect reflection of a male fantasy: "They had turned me into the Playboy centerfold"--Evelyn's transformation remains only skin deep (75). In fact, his response to his new image illustrates that he remains firmly rooted in the masculine position:

I was the object of all the unfocused desires that had ever existed in my own head. I had become my own masturbatory fantasy. And--how can I put it--the cock in my head, still, twitched at the sight of myself. (75)

The arousal of his phantom cock reveals the deep separation that exists between his perceived gender identity and the new female body which Mother has constructed for him. He finds nothing of himself in it, so much so that even his physical response is only a (re)membering of his former masculine gender position. He responds to his own image as if it were something outside of himself or merely the perfect expression of his own male fantasies--the ideal reflection of his desires, but this reflection comes not in the moment of misrecognition of the other but in misrecognizing himself, since

he has become other to himself. The careful "birthing" of Eve has failed. Evelyn's body is radically altered, but he (as well as his original gender position) is not. Mother's conflation of the position of gender and sex has resulted in a failed experiment, although she does not realize it. Her intricate creation of a world wherein men can be turned into women, women who can then give birth to children fathered by themselves, is based on the assumption that there is something about the female body that is "essentially" female.

By reconstructing the biological position of Evelyn (along with a bit of conditioning and a new womb experience), Mother believes that she can create a new woman, Eve. However, Evelyn remains in the masculine gender position, the position which has been constructed for him since his first birth. Mother may be trying to counter the cultural construction of Evelyn's gender by the images and statements which fill up his womb/cell, but these images cannot counteract the lifetime of gender construction that has already been absorbed by Evelyn. In fact, Evelyn's response is not that of an unformed child but is filtered through his original gender position. He is not an infant, and his identity is not a slate that can be erased and then rewritten. The images Mother attempts to use to recreate Evelyn into Eve are interpreted by Evelyn from a masculine position.

After Evelyn has been surgically transformed into a woman by Mother's knife, Mother floods his artificial womb--which is his prison--with images designed to make "the Messiah of the Antithesis" comfortable with his new gender identity and her role as the new "Eve"--a "virgin" who will be impregnated by his/her own sperm. Along

with images of mothers and their children (including animal mothers and their offspring), the movies of Tristessa are used to represent for "Eve" his/her new position as a woman:

I don't know if the movies were selected on purpose, as part of the ritual attrition of my change in ontological status: this is what you've made of women! And now you yourself become what you've made. . . Certainly the films that spun out a thread of illusory reality before my dazed eyes showed me all the pain of womanhood.

Tristessa, your solitude, your melancholy--Our Lady of the Sorrows, Tristessa; you came to me in seven veils of celluloid and demonstrated, in your incomparable tears, every kitsch excess of the mode of femininity. (71)

The films of Tristessa are used to help him understand his new feminine gender position, the position of "the shadowed half being of reflected light" (72). However, it is exactly the ontology of this gender identity that is at issue throughout the text. The fact that this position is one of an image rather than based on a biological or foundational premise is revealed later in the text when it becomes clear that Mother knows the secret of Tristessa. However, her use of Tristessa as the image of womanhood that Eve must come to accept for herself is also ironic because her image was initially so central to the development of the narrator's masculine gender identity.

The opening of the novel makes clear that Tristessa's image has been central to the narrator's development of his gender identity because she was his fantasy

woman during his puberty (which is what he is reliving through the unnamed girl when the novel opens). Although Mother is trying to (re)construct Eve's experience of his gender and alter it so that it matches his new biology, the image she uses is one that is already firmly associated in Eve/lyn's mind with the biological gender that has been constructed for him since birth and, in fact, with his earliest experience of the "twitch in my budding groin" (8).⁷⁸ This attempt at the reprogramming of social constructions of gender identity reveals the radical separation between the narrator's newly constructed biological gender position and his psychological gender identity. He is unable to see himself in the body that has been created for him because his gender identity remains masculine despite his castration and the complete reconstruction of his physical body: "But when I looked in the mirror, I saw Eve; I did not see myself. I saw a young woman who, though she was I, I could in no way acknowledge as myself, for this one was only a lyrical abstraction of femininity to me, a tinted arrangement of curved lines" (74). Schmidt says the narrator experiences "a split between mind and body" (63). The narrator consciously recognizes this split and experiences this mind/body split as if she and he were two separate entities:

I would say that, at this time, I was literally in two minds; my transformation was both perfect and imperfect. All of New Eve's

⁷⁸Mother wants to do what I claim Ballard is doing in Crash; only rather than reconstructing what is considered normative sexuality, Mother wants to rewrite the narrator's understanding of his gender identity. She is trying to accomplish this by the repetition of images meant to reiterate the narrator's position as a woman. However, because these images are already a part of the construction of his masculine gender identity, this reiteration is ineffective.

experience came through two channels of sensation, her own fleshy ones and his mental ones. (77-78)

While the narrator claims to be of "two minds," it is clear that he is more comfortable in one position than he is in the other. As the previous quotes illustrate, he does not "find" himself in the body of Eve. He may experience fleshly sensations through her body, but the "elaborate female apparatus" of this body exists as something external to his understanding of himself. He cannot identify himself with the image in the mirror, and it is not until he escapes Beulah and is raped by Zero that Evelyn understands this new body, an understanding which exists only in the realm of pain.

With his escape from Beulah, Evelyn confronts the chaos of his own existence:

I know nothing. I am a tabula rasa, a blank sheet of paper, an unhatched egg. I have not yet become a woman, although I possess a woman's shape. Not a woman, no; both more and less than a real woman. Now I am a being as mythic and monstrous as Mother herself; but I cannot bring myself to think of that. Eve remains wilfully in the state of innocence that precedes the fall. (83)

Eve may be in a state of innocence, but Evelyn is not. His existence has not been erased with the removal of his genitals. In fact, his gender complicates his experience as Eve since he cannot come to terms with the "gadgetry of her new appearance" (83). His identity has been taken from him as have all his other means of identification (passport, and such, not that these would serve him any longer). All

the external markers of his identity have been erased (except for a slight "family" resemblance in his face), and what he has been left with is a body that is a construction of the ideal male fantasy of female beauty--a body to which he has only an incredibly problematic and distant relationship. He is not Eve, but he is no longer Evelyn either. Eve has no memories, no real internal identity, only a physical one. Evelyn, in turn, has disappeared physically and, therefore, his former gender position is no longer available to him.

Evelyn's encounter with Zero emphasizes this problem, but it also moves Evelyn closer to the gender position of Eve. In "Angela Carter's *Desire Machine*," Robert Clark critiques this novel for what he sees as the "literary sensationalism" of Carter's representation of the rape of Eve/lyn by the isolationist and self-proclaimed Messiah, Zero (152). Clark faults Carter for "unwittingly" supporting "masculinist assumptions" about rape rather than writing about it in a manner that might allow for the "transformation of patriarchal relations" (152). In the scene to which Clark refers, Eve/lyn is initiated into her role as woman through the violent rape by Zero--which act not only strips her of her "virginity" but forces him, for the first time, to recognize himself in the female body that Mother has constructed for him. Prior to the rape, Evelyn's bodily experiences are so externalized as to be less real than the memories of past sensations. And it is only through this rape that Eve/lyn begins to experience the physical reality of his/her new body.

Yet, Clark claims that Carter's representation of the rape of Eve/lyn by Zero "deprives Carter's work of any way of including within its own critical representation

an understanding of the complicity of that representation with the social forces it appears to reject" (154). It is, however, the complexity and ambiguity of Eve/lyn's gender identity in this scene that allows Carter not only to recognize the complicity with patriarchal norms involved in such representations of rape but to critique the way that gender is both constructed and represented in this violent initiation of Eve.

Instead of merely repeating masculinist assumptions, the rape of Eve/lyn by Zero offers an example of Butler's concept of "subversive repetition." Instead of failing to recognize her own complicity with patriarchal understandings of the gendered representations of rape scenes, Carter uses the ambiguity and complexity of gender constructions to create a site for examining those practices which might constitute gender identities.

Clark believes that a feminist text must provide an "alternative" position in order to escape patriarchal oppression. Therefore, for Clark, no such critique of the dominant culture is possible in this novel. In fact, he claims that while Carter may intend to satirize

patriarchal conceptions of women,...her fascination with violent eroticism and her failure to find any alternative basis on which to construct a feminine identity prevent her work from being other than an elaborate trace of women's self-alienation. (159)

But Eve/lyn's self-alienation comes not as a result of the violent rape by Zero but precedes it. Eve/yn's self-alienation is the result of the radical disparity between his masculine gender identity and his female body. This alienation of the narrator from

his/her own body complicates attempts to read the rape of Eve/lyn as simply repeating patriarchal structures because s/he occupies an ambiguous connection to her female gender and, in fact, recognizes himself in his own violator. Therefore, the narrator speaks not only for the feminine gender but challenges masculine assumptions through his/her dualistic response to the event.

Clark, however, reads the rape in such a way as to remove the mind/body gender identity split and treats Eve/lyn as if s/he is as much a concrete feminine object as her newly constructed womb. Carter makes it clear that this is not the case.

This constructed body allows Carter to explore the very notion of an ideal beauty and its essence. The narrator's own reaction to his body in the scene with Mother discussed above reveals that his body is either the result of a perverse sense of humor or revenge, or it illustrates Mother's inability to recognize her own indebtedness to the masculine ideal of beauty. By giving Evelyn the body of a Playboy centerfold, Mother provides Eve/lyn with a body that is a reflection of his own desires. The primary image of feminine beauty in the text, Tristessa, also reveals that this female ideal is constructed, but the rape of Eve/lyn provides a site for exploring the nature of gender identity through the narrator's attempts to understand this experience through both of his gender identities.

Although Eve's body is violently initiated into the female gender position, this initiation is not typical of the "depersonalization that culminates in the pornographic substitution of the fetishized part," as Clark suggests (152). In the rape of Eve, the radical discontinuity between his gender identity and her body is recognized. The

narrator's commentary on his/her rape by Zero is not depersonalized but, instead, directly confronts the complexity of his/her dualistic gender positioning. The quote which opens this chapter illustrates Carter's ability to problematize gender identity through the rape of Eve/lyn; the narrator experiences "a crucial lack of self" because s/he discovers himself in the image of Zero (101-02). His tortured initiation into female sexuality allows him to experience her body as her own, yet this understanding comes only through a moment of great pain and the haunting realization that he is his/her own tormentor. Zero is merely an exaggerated version of his original gender position. The dualism of his altered gender position becomes a lived experience through this rape; and Carter equates this experience to "seppuku," a Japanese ritualistic act of suicide, a return to ground zero. Eve/lyn experiences the rape as a self-destructive act, a willful violation of himself. The pain of the rape forces Eve/lyn to acknowledge his female body; his ability to separate himself from that body, to stand outside it as an observer, is stripped away by Zero. And, yet, because he identifies with Zero, he cannot hide from his masculine identity by becoming only Eve, since he sees himself vividly reflected back at him in Zero's brutality.

However, his subjection to Zero, ironically, brings him much closer to a female gender identity than any of the programming Mother has attempted. While Mother has tried to program Eve through radical reconstructive surgery and continuous images of motherhood and female suffering, it is only as s/he experiences the victimization which is associated with that gender that Evelyn begins to find himself at home in her new body. Zero does what Mother is never able to do,

despite the fact that she and her followers clearly recognize that suffering is the position associated with the female gender in society. Zero initiates Eve/lyn into the world of suffering that is associated with the female gender in much of the novel, the suffering, in particular, of the "most beautiful woman in the world," Tristessa.

When s/he is captured by Zero, Eve/lyn experiences the reality of the suffering position that has been represented by the image of Tristessa. Yet, even this suffering has a dual nature for him that makes it still problematic to attach his/her own gender identity to either binary position. Ironically, Tristessa also has a central place in Zero's mythology. In this mythology, Zero has defined her as "PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE"; he believes that she has sterilized him, in another ironic reversal, with her cinematic gaze. Therefore, even though he has convinced his wives that they need a weekly dose of his sperm to live, his sperm cannot produce life, cannot produce an heir. When Eve/lyn is taken to Zero's room (to be raped again, although this time under the title of wife) s/he discovers a poster of Tristessa:

The only decoration in the room, pinned to the wall behind his head, was a very large poster of Tristessa wearing the bloody nightdress of Madeline Usher. Here she was, always invariable, in this vile place--her huge eyes filled with that wild surmise, that fated quietude. Here she is, my patroness, my guardian angel: I might have known she would be here, to welcome me to pain. (90-91)

As a victim of Zero's sexual violence, Eve/lyn discovers a new connection to the image of Tristessa (through his/her status as victim), but this image is also one which

is "defaced" since Zero has used the poster as a "target for the throwing of knives" (91). Zero, that is, discovers in Tristessa the target for his anger at women and the world. He believes that she has violated his maleness because her image reflects his desire but denies him fulfillment. He thinks that she is a "dyke" and that the "genius" of his "jissom" will not be returned to him until he "stick[s] [his] merciless finger into this ultimate dyke, like the little Dutch boy" (91). Zero has made the discovery of the reclusive Tristessa's home his life's work. In his carefully constructed mythology, he has made her the ultimate enemy and his confrontation with her the quest that motivates his existence. When Zero locates Tristessa's home and attempts to exact his revenge on her, the ironic nature of his categorization of Tristessa is revealed.⁷⁹

But, as Tristessa shows, the image of women as victims is just a role. Tristessa, who is perhaps the greatest performer of this role, and thus the most perfect example of a woman, turns out to be biologically male. By having Eve/lyn experience actual suffering rather than just witnessing it through images, which for him are so connected to his pubescent desire for Tristessa as to be little more than reminders of his former biological gender, Carter allows the character to become a

⁷⁹There is also an irony in the Carter's naming of Zero, since in The Sadeian Woman, Carter, describing the representation of gender often seen in graffiti, says,

The male is positive, an exclamation mark. Woman is negative. Between her legs lies nothing but zero, the sign for nothing, that only becomes something when the male principle fills it with meaning. (4)

So Zero, who sees himself as the ideal version of masculinity, carries the name of the feminine position. Perhaps Carter wants to illustrate that the masculine position must itself discover some "principle" in order to have meaning.

complex embodiment of both genders. Her humiliation and oppression as a "wife" of Zero initiates her into "womanhood." Eve/lyn says, "The mediation of Zero turned me into a woman. More. His preemptory prick turned me into a savage woman" (108). Once again, sex is experienced as mediation, but unlike the opening scene, it is the body of Eve/lyn which becomes the site of this mediation. It is intensely ironic, then, that Tristessa is male.

While the mediation of Zero has made him a "savage woman," Eve/lyn nevertheless continues to occupy the dualism of his gender identity, and this allows Carter to critique as well as to repeat the dominant cultural images. The surgical (re)construction of the gender of the narrator and his/her violent initiation provide us with a subversive repetition of gender construction by destabilizing categories of gender identity, but the possibility of the contestation of these identities is most fully realized in the mating of Tristessa and Eve/lyn. Anticipating the meeting with Tristessa reminds Evelyn of his original gender position. He returns to an understanding of the world that is familiar to him, through the memories associated with Tristessa and his youth. When he sees what he believes is her dead body, he describes himself once again in male terms: "It was as if, like a drowning man, I relived my entire life up to that point in a single instant, so that I was again the child whose dreams she had invaded and also the young man for whom she had become the essence of nostalgia" (118-19). Yet, he immediately is reminded that he is no longer that young man, and Tristessa is equally a part of his new life as Eve. Tristessa is thus the unification of both his gender identities; she is the image which evokes his

past but also the image which contains the creation of his future. Eve/lyn discovers in Tristessa a love that is not limited by gender: "You were the memory of grief and I fell in love with you the minute I saw you, though I was a woman and you were a woman and, at a conservative estimate, old enough to be my mother" (123).

Tristessa and Eve/lyn radically challenge all the taboos of the "heterosexual matrix" since they play a number of roles involving both gender positions and even, perhaps, various versions of the maternal.⁸⁰

Butler, in Gender Trouble, describes the radical redeployment of categories of sex involved in parodic reappropriation of terms such as "queens" and "bitches" as follows:

the perception of the feminine identity would be juxtaposed on the "male body" as ground, but both terms would through the juxtaposition, lose their internal stability and distinctness from each other. Clearly, this way of thinking about gendered exchanges of desire admits of much greater complexity, for the play of masculine and feminine, as well as the inversion of ground to figure can constitute a highly complex and structured production of desire. (123)

When Zero cuts away the g-string Tristessa wears and reveals that she is biologically marked by the "rude, red-purple insignia of maleness," Carter creates such a radical

⁸⁰In Chapter Nine, Tristessa adopts the role of the maternal figure in relation to Eve (this is repeated when s/he seems to confuse Eve with a child that s/he imagines herself to have given birth to and who was then eaten by rats). Eve later takes on a very sexualized version of the maternal when they are in the process of escaping and after the helicopter sets down in the desert.

juxtaposition (128). With a stroke of his knife, in a clearly phallic gesture, Zero shatters the illusion which is Tristessa. The revelation of Tristessa's male body as the ground for the feminine ideal of beauty in the text reveals the "internal instability" of both masculine and feminine. Tristessa's carefully constructed gender identity is revealed to be just that--constructed. In fact, her "male" appendage is seen as the "true" source of her "sorrow, the source of her enigma, of her shame" (128).

Tristessa, who has been presented throughout the novel as the ideal woman, denies ontological conceptions of gender. The narrator says, "Tristessa had no function in the world except as an idea of himself; no ontological status, only an iconographic one" (129). With the revelation of her male genitalia, Tristessa's image is shattered; yet, the nature of her gender identity as performance is revealed. However, the realization that her image is actually the parodying of gender reveals the instability of categories of gender by illustrating that all gender identity is performance--a simulacra performed so convincingly that its existence becomes foundational and its non-existent originary moment turns from utopian fantasy into cultural and biological mythology.

This construction of gender identity can be seen as well in the mock wedding which Zero constructs to avenge the wrong he feels Tristessa has done to him. This scene allows the reader to witness Tristessa's putting on the trappings which constitute her female identity, as Zero in an attempt to humiliate her/him allows Tristessa to return to the gender position s/he most comfortably occupies, the role of the feminine. In this sublimely parodic moment, the performance of gender repeats the constructed nature of gender identity. Tristessa's female identity is restored as they dress "him"

up to play the role of the bride, and "he was his own souvenir of an immediate reality that was not one whit the less effecting because it did not exist" (134). Biologically male, performing a female identity, Tristessa is married to Eve/lyn, a man who has been (re)constructed as a female, restored to his "original" masculine position playing the role of the groom; this multiple layering of gender possibilities challenges gender constructions by denying gender identity any originary or natural moment and revealing its radical contingency:

I entered the realm of negation when I married you with my own wedding ring. You and I, who inhabited false shapes, who appeared to one another doubly masked, like an ultimate mystification, were unknown even to ourselves. Circumstances had forced us both out of the selves into which we had been born and now we were no longer human--the false universals of myth transformed us, now we cast longer shadows than a man does, we were beings composed of echoes. (136)

This coupling casts a deep shadow over the stability of gendered identity. It reveals the unexpected permutations of gender which Butler believes allow us to challenge those identities.

The marriage is "consummated" when Tristessa penetrates Eve, but the dualistic nature of both characters' gender identities complicates this moment as well, for it is Eve who actually "takes" Tristessa: "I clasped my legs about him and drew him into me" (138). The narrator says that with this act the "marriage was

consummated" but that her "womanhood was ratified" as well (138). While this statement is made partially ironically, the ratification of her feminine body truly begins with this coupling. And, therefore, when Tristessa and Eve escape, she introduces herself as "Eve, . . . Eva" and says she comes "From Beulah" (139). The name change and her identification of Beulah as home reveal that she has already altered her own psychological gender position. Later, when they make love in the desert, she begins to discover herself for the first time in the pleasure of her new body. Prior to this moment, her descriptions of sex have been almost clinical, as if she remains an outsider to her own body, even as she begins to experience the pain associated with it.⁸¹ But with the merging of these two characters, she experiences her body as if she has been newly born; she says, "I saw myself. I delighted me. I reached out my hand and touched my own foot in a sudden ecstasy of narcissistic gratification at its delicacy and littleness" (146). She thus discovers the beauty of her own body, the sensations of her own skin, and the uniqueness of arousal as a woman: "With his free hand, he now began to explore the raw, exquisite, violet oyster Holy Mother had inserted in the russet gash that ran over with viscosity and twitched uncontrollably" (148). In this scene, it is Tristessa who is uncomfortable with his body, and Eve uses her body to comfort him and to allow him to explore that body which has been denied him through the construction of his female gender: ". . . I

⁸¹This distance from his/her own body exists even prior to his castration and reconstruction. His preference for images rather than individuals reveals the stark differences between this scene and the other sexual encounters, forced or voluntary, that have preceded it. The descriptions of the pleasure the narrator experiences in "her" body are unique to this one scene.

stretched out my hand and touched his fleece, I grasped a greedy lover's handful of his fleece and drew his head to my breasts" (147). Although this might look like a restoration of what Butler calls the heterosexual matrix, these characters remain in a complex gender configuration. This moment returns to the beginning of the text, when Evelyn was male, and enacts his own fantasies about Tristessa, but in reverse. Neither character's multiple gendering is erased in this moment; instead, Carter offers a site where the contested nature of gender identity is revealed while the possibility of pleasure is celebrated.⁸² The love scene between Tristessa and Eve/lyn thus provides an example of what Butler, in Bodies that Matter, thinks might be provided by the lesbian phallus, "a displacement of the hegemonic symbolic of (heterosexist) sexual difference and the critical release of alternative imaginary schemes for constituting sites of erotogenic pleasure" (91).⁸³ When Tristessa and Evelyn make

⁸²Heather Johnson, in "Textualizing the Double-Gendered Body: Forms of the Grotesque in The Passion of New Eve," agrees that while this scene may "be dismissed by some as a heterosexual fantasy of recaptured unity," it is not, and, in fact, "the celebration of the body and its transgression of gender boundaries is, I think, intended to espouse a positive reading of this image" (47). However, Johnson comes to see their coupling in the text as a kind of return to a platonic, "hermaphroditic" possibility. She envisions this relationship as "making the shape of this one fabulous, mythic creature" (48). However, as is clear from Carter's statements about myth and the skepticism about the mythic realm seen in previous scenes, such a reading would seem to undo the very thing Carter is trying to explore. Rather than creating a mythic beast, no matter how fantastic, Carter creates in this scene an image of pleasure which might exist, however briefly, in the world. Desire and physical pleasure are detailed carefully here; the experience is material rather than mythic in its presentation. Carter does not want to make myth here but to distant this experience from the failed attempts to create myth which mark Eve/lyn's experience with Beulah, Zero, and even the celluloid experience of Tristessa.

⁸³The effect of this encounter, its power, can be seen at the end of the novel when Leilah, now Lilith, returns Evelyn's genitals to Eve. She tells her, "'You can

love in the desert, such an alternative imaginary schema is created; the narrator says, "He and I, she and he, are the sole oasis in this desert. Flesh is a function of enchantment. It uncreates the world" (148). But, while Carter provides the reader with such a moment, she also recognizes that such utopic moments cannot exist, and she quickly has Tristessa killed by the child Colonel and his troops. The flesh can uncreate the world and provide an alternative imaginary schema, but only for a brief instance. In the apocalyptic America of Carter's The Passion of New Eve, desire is drowned out by a bucket of water and a bullet.⁸⁴

Carter, like Butler, understands that any version of utopia is born out of its own moment. Therefore, she does not allow this moment to continue in the text. However, while she refuses to offer up any sustained version of the possibilities created by the coupling of Tristessa and Eve/lyn, the ending of the novel does leave such possibilities open. After a kind of pseudo-symbolic "rebirthing" journey through the cave by the sea, Eve/lyn leaves America in Mother's small boat, headed for England. She has become the New Eve of the title, beginning the journey to the possibilities offered by the pleasure she discovered in the desert. She imagines that she is pregnant with Tristessa's child and that she will give birth not to the new society which Mother has intended but to something else, a new world that is

have them back if you still want them'," and Eve's response is to laugh and throw the box into the sea (187). Eve rejects this symbol of "(heterosexist) sexual difference" because her encounter with Zero has stripped it of its significance for her.

⁸⁴But even the destroyer of Eve/lyn's happiness reveals the complexity of desires and emotions presented in the text, since he is really just a child, and he turns to Eve/lyn for maternal comfort and security against the night.

uniquely her own. But what kind of world will be born, and even the possibility of this new birth, is left open. She sets out saying, "Ocean, ocean, mother of mysteries, bear me to the place of birth" (191). But, the reader does not get to see this birth and may even doubt its actual occurrence because the successful journey of traveling to England from America, the West Coast even, by rowboat seems unlikely, even impossible. However, the narrator does tell the story from the position of the present looking back, so she must have survived. We know little more than this fact. Nevertheless, this ending leaves the reader with the promise of a new understanding of gender identity and sexual pleasure, if not its script.

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