

Against Proper Objects. *Introduction*¹

A set of paradoxes has emerged within recent debates in feminist and queer theory that complicates any effort to stage a simple stand off between the two domains. Within queer studies generally, a methodological distinction has been offered which would distinguish theories of sexuality from theories of gender and, further, allocate the theoretical investigation of sexuality to queer studies, and the analysis of gender to feminism. Consider the introduction to *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* in which an “analogy” (xv) with women’s studies is offered as a way of understanding the range of issues pertaining to lesbian and gay studies. Citing a 1975 essay written by feminist historian Joan Kelly-Gadol, the editors write that “women’s history is not meant to be additive . . . rather, women’s history seeks to establish the centrality of *gender* as a fundamental category of historical analysis and understanding—a category central, in other words, to each of those previously existing sub-departments of history” (xv). Applauding the feminist effort to make gender into “a central category of analysis,” the editors seek to make the same kind of claim for the objects of research proper to lesbian and gay studies: “Lesbian/gay studies does for *sex* and *sexuality* approximately what women’s studies does for *gender*” (xv).

Against Methodology

In laying out the “proper” domain for feminist analysis, the editors of *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* formulate the methodological domain of women’s studies as that which “includes any research that treats gender (whether female or male) as a central category of analysis.” The parenthetical reference to “female or male” suggests that these terms are interchangeable with the notion of gender, although conventional formulations of the sex/gender distinction associated “sex” with female or male—or with the problematic of a continuum between them—and “gender” with the social categories of men and women. This brief and parenthetical suggestion that gender might be understood as equivalent to “female or male” thus appears to rest on a conflation of sex with gender.

Significantly, though “female or male” appear in this formulation of feminism, the term “sex” does not; gender appears to be reduced to sex in this sentence at the same time that the term “sex” remains merely implied. One might think this is a small point. Note, however, that the term “sex” does become explicit in the next sentence, but only as one of the two proper objects of lesbian and gay studies: “sex and sexuality.” In this second context, “sex” appears to mean “sexual desire and practice,” but also the Foucaultian sense of “sex” as a regime of identity or a fictional ideal by which sex as anatomy, sensation, acts, and practice are arbitrarily unified.² If, as appears likely, the Foucaultian meaning of “sex” is implied by its mention in this context, then “sex” would include the matter of “female or male” mentioned above. Thus, the editors lead us through analogy from a feminism in which gender and sex are conflated to a notion of lesbian and gay studies in which “sex” encompasses and exceeds the purview of feminism: “sex” in this second instance would include not only questions of identity and attribute (female or male), but discourses of sensation, acts, and sexual practice as well.

To the extent that the analogy “works” through reference to a term—“sex”—which commonly concerns both feminism and lesbian/gay studies, that commonality must be denied—through elision or through the semantic splitting and redistribution of its constitutive parts. Whereas “sex” in the elided sense attributed to feminism will mean only identity and attribute, “sex” in the explicit and lesbian/gay sense will include and supersede the feminist sense: identity, attribute, sensation, pleasures, acts, and practices. Thus “sex” in the sense deployed by lesbian and gay studies is understood to include the putative feminist binary (female or male), but also to imply the second proper object of lesbian and gay studies: “sexuality.”

I belabor the structure of this analogy because the terms that the analogy seeks to compare are not as separate as they may at first appear. And if the terms are separated in arbitrary or illegible ways (as in the case of “gender [female or male]”) it is because such a separation, however falsifying or arbitrary, assists in making the methodological claim that is supposed to ground lesbian and gay studies as an “autonomous” enterprise.

As the analogy is now set up, feminism is figured as concerned not only with one aspect of “sex”—putative anatomical identity—but with no aspects of sexuality. Is this a description of feminist practice, one which follows feminism’s own self-restriction of its own methodological concerns to that of “gender” (reduced to “sex” in its biological formulations)? Where would the feminist traditions in favor of enhancing sexual freedom fit in such a scheme, much less those that analyze the interrelation of gender and sexuality? Or is it that, whenever feminism engages in such claims it can now be said no longer to be feminism, but rather to belong to the methodology of lesbian and gay studies? Perhaps the restriction of feminism to gender, construed as biological binary, is nothing other than a prescribed restriction of feminist practice to terms illegible to feminist criticism performed in the service of augmenting claims made by lesbian and gay studies for methodological autonomy?

Even if we accept Foucault’s proposal to consider “sex” as a fictional unity, a speculative ideal, which compounds the semantic senses of sex as identity, sensation, and practice, to name a few, are we to accept Foucault’s presumption that “sex” is as monolithic and unified a category as it seems? Does “sex” not gain that appearance of a monolithic unity, a speculative ideal, to the extent that it covers over “sexual difference” or, rather, assimilates sexual difference to the category of “sex”? In so far as lesbian and gay studies relies on *this* notion of sex, then it appears to take as one of its grounds, its founding methodological claims, a refusal of sexual difference in the theoretical constitution of “sex” as a proper object of study.

The terms of the analogy suggest as much once we consider that the theoretical distinction between feminist and lesbian/gay studies effects a refusal of the first term, “gender,” through an assimilation of its elided sense, “sex,” to the second set of terms: “sex and sexuality.” Indeed, only by reducing feminism to “gender,” then implicitly conflating gender with sex, i.e. “female or male,” and then explicitly declaring “sex” to be one of its two proper objects, can lesbian and gay studies establish itself as the proper successor to feminism. This place, however, is established in part through assimilating sexual difference to sex in such a way that sexual difference

itself is refused through the trajectory of the sublation. Sexual difference, irreducible to “gender” or to the putative biological disjunction of “female or male,” is rhetorically refused through the substitution by which a unitary “sex” is installed as the proper object of inquiry.

The appropriation of this view by lesbian and gay studies suggests that the analogy which opens the discussion of proper objects is hardly benign, and that the “ground” is established through a refusal, perhaps a repudiation, of the significance of sexual difference. The distinction between the two domains works in at least two ways. The second term (gay and lesbian studies) is distinguished from the first (feminist studies) through a separation of the *kinds* of objects they pursue. To the extent, however, that the second pursues a kind of object (“sex”) that both refuses and includes the object of the first (“female or male”), that distinction becomes the rhetorical means by which a repudiation is performed. The repudiation begins with the reduction of gender to sex—a caricature of feminist theoretical work of the last twenty years—which then stages the possibility of an assimilation of that caricatured version of feminism to the putatively more expansive terrain of lesbian and gay studies. That assimilation takes place through elision, but also as a chiasmic effect. Considered as analogy, the terms are discrete; considered as an historical account encoded in the terms of analogy, lesbian and gay studies improves upon the terms of feminism; considered as chiasm, the analogy breaks down, and the terms which appear to be parallel (gender and sex/sexuality) or the same (“sex” in the elided sense and “sex” in the explicit sense) are neither, and the narrative of supersession loses its plausibility.

If the “sex” which feminism is said to study constitutes one dimension of the multi-dimensional “sex” that lesbian and gay research is said to study, then the implicit argument is that lesbian and gay studies does precisely what feminism is said to do, but does it in a more expansive and complex way. This distinction between “sex” as anatomical identity and “sex” as regime or practice will become quite crucial to the formulation of lesbian/gay studies as the analysis of sex and sexuality, for the ambiguity of sex as act and identity will be split into univocal dimensions in order to make the claim that the kind of sex that one *is* and the kind of sex that one *does* belong to two separate kinds of analysis: feminist and lesbian/gay, respectively.

And yet, “sex” carries different valences in each context for which the above framework cannot give an adequate account. The terms of the analogy are falsifying to the extent that the object of feminism cannot be reduced to “gender (female or male),” and the “sex” whereof lesbian and gay

studies speaks—to the extent that it defines itself against feminism—is constituted through a repudiation of sexual difference, a move which many lesbian and gay scholars would surely refuse, including no doubt the editors of the volume in question. Indeed, what is at issue is clearly *not* a question of what the editors of the volume intend, given that all three have made strong contributions to feminist scholarship, but rather with a set of political and historical implications of the analogy between feminism and lesbian/gay studies which have been difficult to discern for many of us who work within and between these domains of study.³

The problem here is not just the fairly obvious one that there is little, if any, feminist research that would make use of the oxymoron, “gender (male or female)” as a methodological point of departure. Even Joan Kelly-Gadol’s cited article construes the notion of “sex” as a fully social category and, though published in 1975, a year after the publication of Gayle Rubin’s “The Traffic in Women,” it does not pursue the implications of the sex/gender distinction as is done in the subsequent work of Sherry Ortner, Harriet Whitehead, Moira Gaetens, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Joan W. Scott.⁴ Perhaps more salient here is that “gender” has denoted not a set of attributes or identities, but a framework of differential analysis and “a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (Scott, *Gender* 44). Feminist efforts to refuse the reduction of gender to a disjunctive and biological binarism have been quite central to several disciplines for several decades: a) the work on the biological sciences of Ruth Hubbard, Anne Fausto-Sterling, Monique Wittig, Donna Haraway, Helen Longino to name but a few; b) the massive literature within feminism that not only explores the links among gender, race, and sexuality, but shows how “gender” is produced through these overlapping articulations of power. This scholarship in the fields of Third World and postcolonial feminism has called into question in different ways not only the exclusive focus of feminism on gender, but the centrality of racial and class formations in the constitution of gender itself. Feminists posing these kinds of questions include Norma Alarcón, Cherríe Moraga, Chandra Mohanty, Valerie Smith, Hortense Spillers, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, among scores of others.

Although the problems associated with the sex/gender distinction are many, it seems clear that the more general question of the relation of the biological and the cultural—which includes scholarly reflection on the production of the very distinction between the two categories—has commanded feminist intellectual attention from the beginning of the Second Wave. That there are competing feminist views on how that tension ought to

be formulated is clear, but few, if any, feminist texts proceed with a simple parenthetical conflation of the two. In fact, what is incisive and valuable in feminist work is precisely the kind of thinking that calls into question the settled grounds of analysis. And even the recourse to sexual difference within feminist theory is at its most productive when it is taken not as a ground, foundation, or methodology, but as a *question* posed but not resolved.

What separates the putative object of feminism—gender, construed as sex—from the putative object of lesbian and gay studies—sex, construed as sexuality—is a chiasmic confusion in which the constitutive ambiguity of “sex” is denied in order to make arbitrary territorial claims. And though the language of the editorial introduction to the volume appears to appreciate the feminist precedent, this is an idealization which is perhaps not without its aggression. Indeed, lesbian and gay studies in this form cannot articulate its own “proper object” outside the terms of this analogy with feminism, an analogy that relegates feminism to an analysis of “gender” reduced to a biological frame and evacuated of all sexuality. In this sense, the very formulation of lesbian and gay studies depends upon the evacuation of a sexual discourse from feminism. And what passes as a benign, even respectful, analogy with feminism is the means by which the fields are separated, where that separation requires the desexualization of the feminist project and the appropriation of sexuality as the “proper” object of lesbian/gay studies.

The institution of the “proper object” takes place, as usual, through a mundane sort of violence. Indeed, we might read moments of methodological founding as pervasively anti-historical acts, beginnings which fabricate their legitimating histories through a retroactive narrative, burying complicity and division in and through the funereal figure of the “ground.”

The use of the analogy between feminist and lesbian/gay also presumes that the problem of precedent might be adequately addressed through recourse to a binary frame. Lesbian and gay studies will be derived from feminism, and yet, the editors argue, there will continue to be important communication between the two domains.⁵ But what constitutes these domains as sequential and distinct, framed by analogy and its binary presumption? How is it that this framing of lesbian/gay in relation to feminism forecloses the field of social differences from which both projects emerge? In particular, terms such as “race” and “class” are ruled out from having a constitutive history in determining the parameters of either field. Whether

the position is for or against the centrality of gender to sexuality, it is gender and sexuality alone that remain the common objects of contention. The presumption is that they can be compared and contrasted, but that the binary frame presumed and instituted through the analogy is itself self-evidently “proper.”

Against the Anti-Pornography Paradigm

The anti-pornography movement through the 80s and, more recently, the assimilation of feminist politics to the discourse on victimization, have succeeded in rendering popular a view of feminism in which positions of gender are strictly correlated with positions of domination or subordination within sexuality. Feminist positions such as Catharine MacKinnon’s offer an analysis of sexual relations as structured by relations of coerced subordination, and argue that acts of sexual domination constitute the social meaning of being a “man,” as the condition of coerced subordination constitutes the social meaning of being a “woman.” Such a rigid determinism assimilates any account of sexuality to rigid and determining positions of domination and subordination, and assimilates those positions to the social gender of man and woman. But that deterministic account has come under continuous criticism from feminists not only for an untenable account of female sexuality as coerced subordination, but for the totalizing view of heterosexuality as well—one in which all power relations are reduced to relations of domination—and for the failure to distinguish the presence of coerced domination in sexuality from pleasurable and wanted dynamics of power. The Barnard Conference in 1983 entitled “The Scholar and the Feminist IX” publically staged the debate between feminists who would elevate their readings of pornographic “victimization” to the model for all gender relations, and those who drew on strong feminist traditions of promoting sexual freedom for women to counter the pornography paradigm for thinking sexuality. These latter feminists consistently refused the assimilation of all sexuality to coercive models of domination, and refused as well the assimilation of models of domination to socially fixed positions of gender within a totalizing map of patriarchal domination.

The feminist tradition in favor of sexual freedom,⁶ with strong ties to radical sexual theory and activism, has been clearly voiced by numerous scholars, some of whom, such as Ellen Dubois and Judith Walkowitz, have explicitly argued for the historical links between a progressive sexual politics and feminist aims.⁷ This tradition has continued in the writings of

Dorothy Allison, bell hooks, Cherríe Moraga, Joan Nestle, Esther Newton, Sarah Schulman, and others. Central to Carole Vance's reformulation of this position is a consideration of both the pleasure and the danger of women's sexual freedom, where danger carries both the anti-erotic threat of coerced sexuality, as in rape, battery, and the mundane masculinist rituals of intimidation, and the highly erotic promise of transgressing traditional restrictions on women's sexuality. This purposefully ambiguous agenda thus offered and continues to offer an important alternative to the anti-pornography framework in which every instance of the sexual ambiguity of power is quickly resolved into univocal positions of coercive domination.

Significantly, this very feminist tradition in which both pleasure and danger govern the discourse on sexuality is elided in the articulation of lesbian/gay from feminist in the founding methodology of queer studies. Those radical sexual positions within feminism offered an alternative to the MacKinnon framework and made it possible for many women to remain feminists in spite of the rising popularity of the feminist framework of female victimization. To restrict the proper object of feminism to gender, and to appropriate sexuality as the proper object of lesbian/gay studies, is either to deny this important feminist contribution to the very sexual discourse in which lesbian and gay studies emerged or to argue, implicitly, that the feminist contributions to thinking sexuality culminate in the supersession of feminism by lesbian and gay studies.

The appropriation of Gayle Rubin's influential essay, "Thinking Sex" (1983), as a founding piece in gay and lesbian studies is especially important in understanding the way in which this act of methodological founding depends upon—and enacts—a restriction of the scope of feminist scholarship and activism. Important to underscore is the above mentioned feminist context in which Rubin's essay was published, and the criticisms of some feminist paradigms she offered. Rubin clearly argued that feminism ought not to be the only or the primary theoretical model for understanding sexuality, but her call was not for a lesbian/gay theoretical frame, but for an analysis that might account for the regulation of a wide range of sexual minorities.⁸

Whereas the editors of *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* are right to claim in the introduction to their reprinting of "Thinking Sex" that "[feminism] does not and cannot provide by itself a full explanation for the oppression of sexual minorities," they do not supply any grounds for the claim that lesbian and gay studies can provide by itself a more appropriate framework for the analysis of sexual minorities. A close reading of Rubin's

essay suggests indeed that it would be as much a mistake to hand over the thinking of sexuality to feminism—as its proper object—as it would be to hand it over to lesbian and gay studies—as its proper object.

In the final two pages of the essay, Rubin effects a number of controversial moves which have set the stage for conceptualizing gender and sexuality as two separable domains of analysis. She opposes reductive mono-causal accounts in which either all of sexuality is attributable to gender or all of gender is construed as the causal effect of regimes of sexuality. If sexual relations cannot be reduced to gender positions, which seems true enough, it does not follow that an analysis of sexual relations apart from an analysis of gender relations is possible. Their interrelation may have a necessity that is neither causal nor fixed for all time. Indeed, in the place of a methodological separation of lesbian/gay and feminist studies, it may be that non-reductive and non-causal accounts of the relation of gender and sexuality are in order. The separation of the two domains by Rubin is meant to contest those feminist efforts “which treat sexuality as a derivation of gender” (308). Understood this way, the separation of the two domains is to be contextualized within the effort to dispute those feminist frameworks which seek to establish sexuality, and sexual domination in particular, as the scene by which gender positions are installed and consolidated along an axis of domination and submission.

Rubin’s critique of the causal reduction of sexuality to gender in “Thinking Sex” signalled an important departure from her earlier work. Whereas in “The Traffic in Women: Towards a ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” gender was construed as the instrument and effect of sexual regimes, in “Thinking Sex” Rubin refers to sexuality as an “autonomous” (309) domain. This separation of gender and sexuality suggests that feminism, considered as an analysis of gender, is not necessarily the most appropriate discourse for considering the kinds of power relations within which sexuality is formed and regulated. Rubin refers to the fusion of two different meanings of “sex” whereby to be a sex implies having sex in a given way, that is, that “sexuality is reducible to sexual intercourse and that it is a function of the relations between women and men” (307). Where and when a feminist analysis accepts this cultural presumption, feminism actively recapitulates heterosexist hegemony. For example, MacKinnon’s view of feminism is one which makes free use of the copula in which causal relations are elliptically asserted through the postulation of equivalences, i.e. within the structures of male dominance, conceived exclusively as heterosexual, sex is gender is sexual positionality. Although MacKinnon seeks to explain this hegemony, the terms

by which the explanation proceeds tend to freeze the relations described, thus recapitulating the very cultural presumption of a heterosexually framed scene of sexual domination. *But when and where feminism refuses to derive gender from sex or from sexuality, feminism appears to be part of the very critical practice that contests the heterosexual matrix, pursuing the specific social organization of each of these relations as well as their capacity for social transformation.*

Significantly, Rubin situates her own position historically. She begins the argument by claiming quite clearly that a “rich discussion [on sexuality] is evidence that the feminist movement will always be a source of interesting thought about sex,” and then proceeds to question whether “feminism is or ought to be the privileged site of a theory of sexuality.” This sentence is then followed by another in which feminism is given definition: “Feminism is the theory of gender oppression,” and then, “it does not follow that a theory of gender oppression, that is, an analysis of oppression on the basis of gender, will offer up an adequate theory of sexual oppression, oppression on the basis of sexual practice” (307).

Toward the end of this short theoretical conclusion of the “Thinking Sex” essay, Rubin returns to feminism in a gestural way, suggesting that “in the long run, feminism’s critique of gender hierarchy must be incorporated into a radical theory of sex, and the critique of sexual oppression should enrich feminism. But an autonomous theory and politics specific to sexuality must be developed” (309). Hence, for Rubin, a separate account of sexual oppression, one which accounts for sexual minorities, including queers, sadomasochists, transvestites, inter-generational partners, and prostitutes is an historical necessity in 1983. The contemporary appropriation of this position for founding lesbian and gay studies thus reduces the expansive category of sexual minorities to the representation of one group of members on the list.

According to the logic of Rubin’s argument, it would be as wrong to claim that gender can only or best be understood in the context of class (as some Marxists have argued) as it would be to claim that sexuality can only or best be understood in the context of gender (as some feminists have argued). By extension, it would be equally fallacious to claim that sexuality is only or best understood in the context of lesbian and gay studies. Indeed, according to Rubin’s logic, sexuality is no more likely to receive a thorough analysis under the rubric of lesbian and gay studies than it is under that of feminist studies. Not only do central notions like the racialization of sexuality get dropped or domesticated as “instances” of either feminism or lesbian and

gay studies, but the notion of sexual minorities, which include sex workers, transsexuals, and cross-generational partners, cannot be adequately approached through a framework of lesbian and gay studies. One need only consider the absurdity of the claim that the history and politics of prostitution is best served within the framework of lesbian and gay studies. Similarly, the important dissonance between transsexuality and homosexuality is lost when and if the claim is made that the analysis of transsexuality is best served within the frame of lesbian and gay studies. Indeed, to the extent that lesbian and gay studies refuses the domain of gender, it disqualifies itself from the analysis of transgendered sexuality altogether. And though it is clear that lesbian and gay studies may have some interesting perspectives to contribute to the analysis of heterosexuality, it would be quite a leap to claim that heterosexuality ought now to become the exclusive or proper object of lesbian and gay studies. Yet, all of these improbable claims are invited by the methodological announcement that “sex and sexuality” constitute the proper object of inquiry for lesbian and gay studies and, by implication, *not* the proper object for other kinds of inquiry.

Rubin’s essay called for political attention to be paid to “sexual minorities” who are not always women, and who constitute a class of sexual actors whose behavior is categorized and regulated by the state in invasive and pathologizing ways. The expansive and coalitional sense of “sexual minorities” cannot be rendered interchangeable with “lesbian and gay,” and it remains an open question whether “queer” can achieve these same goals of inclusiveness.

Has “The Long Run” Arrived?

It is important to appreciate the way in which Rubin’s revision of the early essay is simultaneous with her effort to separate a theory and politics of sexuality from one of feminism. In some ways, it is the figure of MacKinnon against whom Rubin’s own position is articulated. It is, after all, MacKinnon who in Rubin’s terms “attempt[s] to subsume sexuality under feminist thought.” She does this by arguing that genders are the direct consequence of the social constitution of sexuality. In MacKinnon’s terms, “the molding, direction, and expression of sexuality organizes society into two sexes, women and men” (“Traffic” 182).

As important as it is to oppose the theory and politics of MacKinnon’s version of gender oppression, Rubin’s tactic of separating sexuality from the sphere of feminist critique has taken on implications that could not

have been foreseen when the essay was written. With the recent media success of anti-pornography feminists, and the veritable identification of feminism with a MacKinnon-style agenda, feminism has become identified with state-allied regulatory power over sexuality. This shift in public discourse has backgrounded those *feminist* positions strongly opposed to MacKinnon's theory and politics, including Rubin's own.⁹ As a result, those feminist positions which have insisted on strong alliances with sexual minorities and which are skeptical of the consolidation of the regulatory power of the state have become barely legible as "feminist." A further expropriation of the tradition of sexual freedom from the domain of feminism has taken place, then, through the odd twist by which feminism is said no longer to have "sexuality" as one of its objects of inquiry.

Rubin's own essay, however, works along slightly different lines. In "Thinking Sex," Rubin seeks recourse to Foucault to put into question the very relation between kinship relations and gender that had been at the center of "The Traffic in Women." She writes,

It appeared to me at that time that gender and desire were systematically intertwined in such social formations. This may or may not be an accurate assessment of the relationship between sex and gender in tribal organizations. But it is surely not an adequate formulation for sexuality in Western industrial societies. As Foucault has pointed out, a system of sexuality has emerged out of earlier kinship forms and has acquired significant autonomy. (307)

In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault claims that from the 18th century onward, there is a new apparatus superimposed on the system of kinship, the emergence of and deployment of "sexuality."¹⁰ He then proceeds to make a distinction which seems to have central importance for Rubin in "Thinking Sex": with respect to kinship, he argues, "what is pertinent is the link between partners and definite statutes," and in sexuality, what is pertinent is "the sensations of the body, the quality of pleasures, and the nature of impressions" (106). Whereas kinship appears to be regulated by juridical strictures pertaining to persons and their appropriate social functions, sexuality takes impressions and sensations as the field to be regulated.

Rubin's own essay in which this citation appears is primarily concerned with juridical efforts in the early 1980s to restrict sexual acts and practices, to narrow the notion of juridical consent, and to banish sexual activity from public spaces. In support of the claim that sexuality constitutes

a new domain of regulation, and that sexual oppression is distinct from gender oppression, she offers an historical argument that sexuality is no longer formed or constrained by kinship. The presumption here is that gender oppression can be understood through the regulation of kinship, and that kinship no longer operates as it once did to install and perpetuate gender relations through the regulation of sexuality within specific constraints of kinship, that is, through the workings of sanction and prohibition. Kinship formed the focus of Rubin's "Traffic" essay, and the effect of the historical distinction that she makes here between kinship and sexuality is to claim that the latter essay supersedes the former.

But is this supersession possible? Is the historical and analytic distinction between kinship and sexuality finally tenable? Rubin's focus in "Traffic" on kinship as a way of regulating sexuality implied that in the absence of explicit rules and institutions, kinship survives psychically as the force of prohibition and guilt in sexual life. Hence, the feminist justification for the turn to psychoanalysis was grounded precisely in this requirement to read the traces of kinship in psychic life. The putatively historical shift from kinship to sexuality, associated with the methodological shift from gender to sexuality, necessitates a turn from psychoanalysis to Foucault. But can the latter term (of any of these pairs) be fully or meaningfully separated from the former?¹¹

The argument in "Thinking Sex" that posits the anachronism of kinship is supported by a Foucaultian historiography in which state-sponsored efforts at population control and the heightened medicalization of sexuality are figured as replacing kinship as the organizing structure of sexuality. This new deployment, argues Foucault, proceeds through diagnosis and normalization rather than through taboos and sanctions. And yet, the limiting presumption of a European history constrains the plausibility of the narration of such a "shift." How do the geopolitical constraints of that history restrict the generalizability of the argument in whose service it is invoked? And even if certain forms of kinship within certain European contexts lose the power to organize sexuality unilaterally, and public discourses on sexuality become more central, are there reconfigured forms of kinship that result from this very shift and which exert an organizational force on sexuality?

In following Foucault's scheme, Rubin severs the newer deployment of sexuality from the older regime of kinship, dropping the psychoanalytic analysis offered in "Traffic" and offering in its place a regime-theory of sexuality, which would include psychoanalysis itself as one of its regulatory modes. The credibility of this argument rests on the proposition that the

modern, medicalized regime by which sensation and pleasure are normalized is not in the service of “family values” or a given normative view of kinship relations. That it is sometimes in precisely that service suggests that whereas it would be a mistake to argue that kinship relations uniformly govern the regulation of sexuality, it would be equally mistaken to claim their radical separability. In fact, the analysis of sexual minorities, offered as a separate class, requires to be thought in relation to an analysis of normative kinship. Consider the various juridical efforts to control inter-generational sexuality in which the figure of the sexually endangered child is almost always positioned outside the home, thus veiling the sexual abuse of children within the home in the service of an idealized view of the family as a desexualized safe haven for children. Consider as well the prohibitions on public sex which redraw the public/private distinction, and reprivatize sexual relations, where notions of “privacy” apply almost exclusively to the state-sanctioned forms of heterosexual conjugality (cf. *Bowers v. Hardwick*). Consider as well the sequestration of HIV positive prostitutes and gay men, and the construction of both venues for sexuality as causally—rather than conditionally—linked to the disease; the moralizing against those at risk for AIDS by virtue of their sexual practices directly supports the ideological fiction of marriage and the family as the normalized and privileged domain of sexuality.

We might read the desire for a sexuality beyond kinship as a sign of a certain utopian strain in sexual thinking which is bound to fail, and which requires that our conceptions of kinship remain frozen in their most highly normative and oppressive modes. Those who imagine themselves to be “beyond” kinship will nevertheless find terms to describe those supporting social arrangements which constitute kinship. Kinship in this sense is not to be identified with any of its positive forms, but rather as a site of redefinition which can move beyond patrilineality, compulsory heterosexuality, and the symbolic overdetermination of biology. Examples of the convergence of queer and kinship concerns include the “buddy” system set up by Gay Men’s Health Crisis and other AIDS service organizations to fulfill the social and medical support needs of its patients; laws legitimating lesbian and gay parenting and adoption; legal claims of guardianship; the rights to make medical decisions for incapacitated lovers; the right to receive and dispose of the body of a deceased lover, to receive property, to execute the will. And in lesbian and gay human rights work, it is common to find that lesbian and gay rights are not recognized as “human” rights precisely because lesbians and gay men, along with other sexual minorities, are not perceived as sufficiently

“human” given their estrangement or opposition to the normative kinship configurations by which the “human” becomes recognizable.

The effort to think sexuality outside of its relation to kinship is, thus, not the same as thinking sexuality apart from reproduction, for reproductive relations constitute only one dimension of kinship relations. To claim that the two domains ought to be thought in relation to one another is not to claim that sexuality ought to remain restricted within the terms of kinship; on the contrary, it is only to claim that the attempt to contain sexuality within the domain of legitimate kinship is supported by moralizing and pathologizing discourses and institutions. It is that complicity—and the risks of breaking with that complicity—that requires us to understand the two domains in relation to each other.

Apart from these explicit demands and difficulties of kinship, and their clear relation to the regulation of sexual life, there is perhaps a less tangible desire to be discerned in the theoretical effort to separate the analysis of sexuality from the study of kinship, namely, the desire to desire beyond the psyche, beyond the traces of kinship that psyches bear. These include the formative and consequential markings of culturally specific familial organizations, powerful and shaping experiences of sexual prohibition, degradation, excitation, and betrayal.

Politically, the costs are too great to choose between feminism, on the one hand, and radical sexual theory, on the other. Indeed, it may be precisely the time to take part in what Rubin in 1984 foresaw as the necessity, “in the long run,” for feminism to offer a critique of gender hierarchy that might be incorporated into a radical theory of sex, and for radical sexual theory to challenge and enrich feminism. Both sets of movements might also strengthen the feminist effort to displace MacKinnon’s structurally static account of gender, its pro-censorship position, and its falsifying cultural generalizations about the eternally victimized position of women.¹²

The Trouble with Gender

A characterization of feminism as an exclusive focus on gender thus misrepresents the recent history of feminism in several significant ways: 1) the history of radical feminist sexual politics is erased from the proper characterization of feminism; 2) the various anti-racist positions developed within feminist frameworks for which gender is no more central than race, or for which gender is no more central than colonial positionality or class—the domains of socialist feminism, postcolonial feminism, Third

World feminism—are no longer part of the central or proper focus of feminism; 3) the MacKinnon account of gender and sexuality is taken as paradigmatic of feminism, and the strong feminist opposition to her work is excluded from the parameters of feminism; 4) gender is reduced to sex (and sometimes to sex-assignment), rendered fixed or “given,” and the contested history of the sex/gender distinction is displaced from view; 5) the normative operation of gender in the regulation of sexuality is denied. The result is that the sexual contestation of gender norms is no longer an “object” of analysis within either frame, as it crosses the very domains of analysis that this methodological claim for lesbian and gay studies strains to keep apart.

Finally, the significant differences between feminists who make use of the category of gender, and those who work within the framework of sexual difference is erased from view by this simplistic formulation of feminism. In Rosi Braidotti’s feminist theoretical work, sexual difference can be reduced neither to a biological difference nor to a sociological notion of gender. In her view, the sex-gender distinction makes little sense within the framework of sexual difference. Whereas for her sexual difference has a discursive life, it is irreducible to discourse. Along with Elizabeth Grosz, Braidotti seeks to rethink corporeality in semiotic and symbolic terms that articulate sexual difference in ways that defy biologism and culturalism at once. Indeed, within such theories the notion of sexual difference is irreducible to gender, and both of those notions are irreducible to sex or sex-assignment. In fact, those who work within the framework of sexual difference argue against “gender” on the grounds that it presupposes a notion of cultural construction in which the subject is taken as a given, and gender then acquires a supplementary meaning or role. Some would argue that such a view can recognize neither the way in which the workings of sexual difference in language establish the subject nor the masculinity of that subject—and the exclusion of the feminine from subject formation that that subject requires. Others would claim that there may well be a feminine subject, but that an understanding of the formation of the subject is still *an effect* of sexual difference. Gender theory misunderstands the ways in which that asymmetrical relation between the sexes is installed through the primary workings of language, which presuppose the production of the unconscious. The turn to gender, for those who emerge from a Lacanian or post-Lacanian tradition, signals a papering over of this more fundamental structuring of language, intelligibility, and the production of the subject along the axis of a split which also produces the unconscious.

In some contemporary European contexts, the turn to gender and gender studies is explicitly taken to be a turn away from a feminist analysis which insists on the fundamental or persistent character of this sexual asymmetry. According to Braidotti, some versions of the gender studies model consider the cultural construction of femininity and masculinity as homologous kinds of constructions, which suggests that the study of gender directly contradicts the political impetus of feminist analysis—to mark the constitutive asymmetry of sexed positions by which language and the unconscious emerge.

Oddly, then, within the U.S., feminism is under criticism from lesbian and gay studies for its ostensibly exclusive emphasis on gender, whereas in some European contexts, the turn to gender is understood as an anti-feminist move and a deradicalization of the feminist political agenda. Paradoxically, this construal of feminism as exclusively focused on gender not only denies the history of U.S. feminist claims for radical sexual freedom, but also denies the emergence of a feminism specific to women of color in the U.S. who have sought to complicate the feminist framework to take account of relations of power that help to constitute and yet exceed gender, including race and racialization, as well as geopolitical positionality in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Whereas the turn to gender was for some U.S. feminists, then, a way to move beyond sexual difference as a framework which appeared to give priority to “masculine” and “feminine” at the expense of other kinds of differences, relations, institutions, and contexts, gender has become, in some European contexts, a sign of a politically defused feminism, a framework which assumes the symmetrical positioning of men and women along with the homologous means of their construction.

Within the course of several months I have heard feminist scholars in the U.S. worry that gender has been “destroyed” through the recent criticisms of feminism’s presumptive heterosexuality. On the other hand, I have heard feminists who work within structuralist and poststructuralist accounts of sexual difference lament the reduction of a psychoanalytically complicated notion of sexual difference to an apparently sociological notion of gender. “Death to gender!” recently remarked a feminist friend objecting to the replacement of a feminist perspective on sexual difference by a theory of the cultural or social construction of gender. From what feminist position does this call for the destruction of gender come, and from what concerns does the feminist worry over its dissolution emerge? Is it too alive or too moribund, and is “it” the selfsame gender?

A feminist analysis that takes sexual difference as a point of departure tends to ask how it is that masculine and feminine are constituted differentially, and to insist that this differential is non-dialectical and asymmetrical in character. The recourse to a symbolic domain is one in which those positionalities are established and which, in turn, set the parameters for notions of the social. The analysis of gender, on the other hand, tends toward a sociology, neglecting the symbolic or psychoanalytic account by which masculine and feminine are established in language prior to any given social configuration. Recourse to sexual difference, then, tends to be concerned with the status of the asymmetrical relation or, in Lacanian terms, “non-relation” between the sexes as well as the separability of the symbolic and social domains whereby the symbolic is understood to precede and orchestrate the parameters of the social.

Whereas some cultural constructionists might claim that gender is equivalent to its construction, those who work within—and in a productively critical relation to—the Lacanian frame of sexual difference would insist on the radical *incommensurability* of the feminine with any of its given articulations. Irigaray, for instance, maintains that the feminine is necessarily redoubled, that it exists first as a signifier within a masculinist economy, but then it “exists” outside that economy (where nothing may exist), as precisely what that economy must repudiate in order to simulate its own representation of the feminine as the feminine itself. This lays the groundwork for Naomi Schor’s insistence that recourse to the feminine involves a “double mimesis” (48). *Gender theory, according to this framework, would misidentify the construction of the feminine within a masculinist economy with the feminine itself*, thereby effecting a complicity with the socially given modes of masculine and feminine, and forfeiting the critical distance required for a feminist contestation of these constructions.¹³

When Irigaray claims that the feminine is always elsewhere, she is marking out a space for the feminine that exceeds and defies any of its given or positive articulations. This becomes a necessity on the presumption that the existing field of articulability is governed and constrained by phallogocentrism. Thus, when Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that the feminine is produced and erased at the same time, she means that the effect of that very discursive production (within masculinism) accomplishes the repudiation and refusal of the feminine. This second reference to the feminine resists representation because representation is predicated on the resistance and repudiation of the feminine. Something similar is argued by Drucilla Cornell when she insists that the feminine has no place in reality

(16–20). The feminine marks that limit of representability which would undo the presuppositions of representation itself (and in Cornell’s work is thus associated with the sublime). For each of these views, the cultural construction of “women” constitutes the effacement of women, and those who take the construction of women to be the “truth” of women close the critical gap that it is feminism’s task to keep open.

From this perspective on the incommensurability of the “feminine” or “woman” with any living being, a set of critical questions emerge that take issue with gender theory and its tendency to conflate the symbolic and the social: what is the system or, less rigidly, the field of representation in which feminism seeks to make its claims, and how do we understand the persistent failure of representing women within that field as marking the limit of representability as such? If the representations that do exist are normative phantasms, then how are we to reverse or contest the force of those representations? In what manner of double-speak must feminism proceed, when it is understood as the unrepresentable in its paradoxical effort to represent itself?¹⁴

A symbolic status is often attributed to this founding scene by which the feminine is repudiated and assumes its ambiguous status as the limit of representability. To be more precise, this repudiation or exile is understood as what enables and structures the articulation of the symbolic itself. The symbolic is understood as a field of normativity that exceeds and structures the domain of the socially given. And yet, how are we to think the relation between the symbolic and the social? Is this structure of feminine repudiation not *reinforced* by the very theory which claims that the structure is somehow prior to any given social organization, and as such resists social transformation? The heterosexual pathos of the founding scene of psychoanalysis is reinforced precisely by those descriptions in which the phallus emerges as primary signifier and the feminine as the always already repudiated. The claim that masculine and feminine are forever constituted in this particular asymmetry appears to reconsolidate the cultural presumption of heterosexist hegemony.

If, then, what is called “the symbolic” encodes a socially sedimented heterosexual pathos, how ought the relation between the social and the symbolic to be reconfigured? If the symbolic is subject to rearticulation under the pressure of social arrangements, how might that be described, and will such descriptions trouble any effort to draw a clear distinction between the social and the symbolic? Has the social—within postmarxism—become equated with the descriptively given, and how might ideality (possibility,

transformability) be reintroduced into feminist accounts of the social? Such a project would refuse the simple conflation of the domain of the social with what is socially given or already constituted, and reformulate a Marxian account of social transformation outside of implausible historical teleologies. To the extent that views of social transformation have relied on such teleological accounts of history, it seems imperative to separate the question of transformation from teleology. Otherwise, the site of political expectation becomes precisely the incommensurability between a symbolic and a social domain, one in which the symbolic now encodes precisely the ideality evacuated, after Marxism, from the domain of the social.

Finally, how would a troubling of the distinction between the symbolic and the social diffuse the current tension between the frameworks of sexual difference and gender? In other words, if gender designates a cultural or social sphere of acquired and variable meanings, then how is this sphere to be thought in dynamic relation to reigning schemes of sexual normativity?

In my view, the hetero-pathos that pervades the legacy of Lacanian psychoanalysis and some of its feminist reformulations can be countered only by rendering the symbolic increasingly dynamic, that is, by considering the conditions and limits of representation and representability as open to significant rearticulations and transformations under the pressure of social practices of various kinds. On the other hand, it seems clear that the methodological separation of questions of sexuality from questions either of sexual difference or of gender within lesbian and gay studies reintroduces the problem of the feminine—and feminism—as the site of the unrepresentable. If gender is said to belong to feminism, and sexuality in the hands of lesbian and gay studies is conceived as liberated from gender, then the sexuality that is “liberated” from feminism will be one which suspends the reference to masculine and feminine, reenforcing the refusal to mark that difference, which is the conventional way in which the masculine has achieved the status of the “sex” which is one. Such a “liberation” dovetails with mainstream conservatism and with male dominance in its many and various forms, thus to a large extent calling into question the assumed symmetry of “lesbian and gay”—a symmetry grounded in the separation of lesbian from feminist, of “sex” from sexual difference, a ground constituted through the enactment and covering of a split.

In a recent article in the *Village Voice*, Richard Goldstein warns against the anti-feminism accompanying the rise of gay conservatives to power positions within the queer movement.

The biggest blunder of gay conservatives is to ignore the most important alliance gay people can make. That is the bond between queers and feminists. It's no surprise that the gay right overlooks this possibility. Their frat is not just male, but masculinist. Though they'd never be caught in leather, gayocons worship the sexual hierarchy that affirms male power. (28)

It is no surprise, then, that the “gayocon” sensibility has arrived in queer studies, where methodological distinctions perform the academic version of breaking coalition.

Although my own abbreviated formulations of these debates are surely contestable, they are offered here as provocations for further contestation among feminist scholars of various persuasions who are open to a consideration of how heterosexual presumption structures some of the founding scenes of feminist inquiry, but also to queer scholars who seek to sustain connections to a more expansive conception of critique and who are suspicious of the amnesias supporting the progressive historical claims of the avant-garde. I would insist that both feminist and queer studies need to move beyond and against those methodological demands which force separations in the interests of canonization and provisional institutional legitimation. For the analysis of racialization and class is at least equally important in the thinking of sexuality as either gender or homosexuality, and these last two are not separable from more complex and complicitous formations of power. Indeed, it is that complexity and complicity that call to be thought most urgently, which means thinking against the institutional separatisms which work effectively to keep thought narrow, sectarian, and self-serving. The critique of the conservative force of institutionalization ought to be kept alive as a crucial mode of self-interrogation in the rush to acquire new legitimacy. Perhaps the time has arrived to encourage the kinds of conversations that resist the urge to stake territorial claims through the reduction or caricature of the positions from which they are differentiated. The “grounds” of autonomy are precisely these sites of differentiation, which are not grounds in any conventional sense. These are rifted grounds, a series of constituting differentiations which at once contest the claim to autonomy and offer in its place a more expansive, mobile mapping of power. There is more to learn from upsetting such grounds, reversing the exclusions by which they are instated, and resisting the institutional domestication of queer thinking. For normalizing the queer would be, after all, its sad finish.

I have pursued two interviews in an effort to provoke a remapping

of the terms of debate, and to encourage a kind of intellectual trespass which values the expansive possibilities of such confrontations over the retreat into intellectual territory.

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Notes

- 1 Throughout this essay I draw upon Biddy Martin's conceptualization of the problematic relation between gender and sexuality in contemporary feminist and queer studies. Not only in conversation, but in her written work as well, she has insisted on theory as a "moving between" what have become, for some, polarized or separate positions. She deftly argues in "Sexuality without Genders and Other Queer Utopias" against certain trends within contemporary theory on the construction of social identities. Bodies, she writes, ought not to be described as simple effects of discourse or as the malleable surface of social inscription, but considered in a more complex and intimate relation with psychic reality. She claims as well that there are problems with theories that tend to foreground gender at the expense of sexuality and race, sexuality at the expense of gender and race, and race at the expense of sexuality and gender. Her analysis offers a set of trenchant critiques which show that certain political agendas are served through the foregrounding of one determinant of the body over others, but also that those very theories are weakened by their failure to broach the complex interrelations of these terms.
- 2 Foucault himself argues against the use of sex as "fictitious unity . . . [and] causal principle": "[T]he notion of 'sex' made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning: sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as a universal signified" (*History* 154).
- 3 My argument here is with the implicit reasoning whereby a grounding of lesbian and gay studies takes place, a form of argumentation which has been reiterated in a variety of contexts, and which the editors of the volume cite implicitly from those sources. In fact, I would argue that much of the scholarship of Abelow, Barale, and Halperin have important feminist dimensions, and that they have marked several essays in the volume they edited as contributing to a dialogue between feminism and queer studies. Indeed, I think it would be a mistake, finally uninteresting and unproductive, to hold any of these authors—or any others—responsible for the analogy in question. The analogy is much more important as a theoretical development with cultural currency that exceeds the particular articulations it receives in the works of specific authors.
- 4 The editors cite both the late Joan Kelly-Gadol and Joan W. Scott as examples of feminists who have made gender into a central focus

for women's history. Yet both of these writers have insisted that the turn to gender opens up the question of how a monolithic history might be retold in which the presumption of symmetry between men and women is contested. Interestingly, the framework for lesbian and gay studies that is founded through this analogy with their work assumes a symmetry that their work contests.

- 5 The editors write "Lesbian/gay studies does for sex and *sexuality* approximately what women's studies does for gender. That does not mean that sexuality and gender must be strictly partitioned. On the contrary, the problem of how to understand the connections between sexuality and gender continues to furnish an illuminating topic of discussion in both women's studies and lesbian/gay studies; hence, the degree of overlap or of distinctness between the fields of lesbian/gay studies and women's studies is a matter of lively debate and ongoing negotiation" (xv–xvi).
- 6 The feminist tradition of sexual freedom appears most recently to be identified with a strong defense of civil liberties and, on occasion, an affiliation with civil libertarianism. But nineteenth century socialist traditions of sexual freedom were centrally concerned with a critique of the family and with state institutions. A contemporary articulation of a feminist theory of freedom needs to be developed in relation to a critique of individualism, of centralized state power in its regulatory dimensions, and the interrelation between the two.
- 7 The volumes *Pleasure and Danger* edited by Carole S. Vance and *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* edited by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson were centrally important in waging this critique of the anti-pornography paradigm.
- 8 In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick makes use of Rubin's distinction between gender and sexuality to argue that sexuality has a kind of ambiguity that gender does not. Sedgwick claims that "virtually all people are publically and unalterably assigned to one or the other gender, and from birth. . . ." On the other hand, "sexual orientation, with its far greater potential for rearrangement, ambiguity, and representational doubleness . . . offer(s) the apter deconstructive object" (34). Sedgwick thus identifies the question of gender with the question of sex-assignment, and then appears to make the presumption that the assignment of sex "works"—a presumption that psychoanalytic theory, which retains an emphasis on unconscious fantasy, would call into question. Even if one were to accept the reduction of gender with its complex social variability to the notion of sex-assignment (a pre-feminist construal of "gender"), it seems that "assignment" might be reconsidered in terms of the complex dynamic of social interpellation, whereby being called "a girl" is simply not enough to make it so. The problem of assuming an assignment can be understood only through a consideration of psychic resistance and ambivalence proper to a theory of identification, processes which collectively call into question the efficacy of "assignment" both as a social performative and as the basis for a theory of gender.
For an extended analysis of Sedgwick's account of gender, see Biddy Martin's excellent essay, "Sexualities Without Genders and Other Queer Utopias." Martin considers those passages in which Sedgwick understands feminism to be exclusively concerned with "the question of who is to have control of women's (biologically) distinctive reproductive capability" (*Epistemology* 28). Such

a restriction of feminist work to this particular question misconstrues the range of feminist engagements with questions of reproduction, but also with non-reproductive sexuality. If we consider those feminist questions not as who controls women's reproductive capacities, but rather, as whether women may lay claim to sexual freedom outside the domain of reproduction, then the question of *sexuality* proves as central to the feminist project as the question of *gender*.

By separating sexuality from gender in this way, Sedgwick also restricts the scope of Rubin's coalitional understanding of "sexual minorities." Whereas Rubin saw the turn to sexuality as a way to provide a framework which would include and link queers, transgendered people, cross-generational partners, prostitutes, Sedgwick understands sexuality as the proper domain of lesbian and gay studies or, rather, of "an antihomophobic inquiry" (15). By separating the notion of gender from sexuality, Sedgwick narrows the notion of sexual minorities offered by Rubin, distancing queer studies from the consideration of transgendered persons, transgendered sexualities, transsexuality, transvestism, cross-dressing, and cross-gendered identification. Although Sedgwick appears to defend this methodological separation, her own readings often make rich and brilliant use of the problematic of cross-gendered identification and cross-sexual identification. See, for instance, "White Glasses" in *Tendencies*.

Finally, it seems that we might accept the irreducibility of sexuality to gender or gender to sexuality, but still insist on the necessity of their interrelationship. If gender is more than a "stigmata," a "tag" that one wears, but is, rather, a normative institution

which seeks to regulate those expressions of sexuality that contest the normative boundaries of gender, then gender is one of the normative means by which the regulation of sexuality takes place. The threat of homosexuality thus takes the form of a threat to established masculinity or established femininity, although we know that those threats can reverse their direction, enabling precisely the occasions for the proliferation of what is to be prohibited.

- 9 See the work of Wendy Brown, Carol Clover, Drucilla Cornell, Lisa Duggan, bell hooks, Nan Hunter, Molly Ladd-Taylor, Anne McClintock, Mandy Merck, Carole Vance, and Linda Williams, to name a few.
- 10 For a fuller elaboration, see my "Sexual Inversions."
- 11 Teresa de Lauretis's recent *The Practice of Love* crosses feminist with gay and lesbian studies in such a way that sexuality is not reducible to gender and neither is Foucault fully incompatible with psychoanalysis.
- 12 See Chandra Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes" not for a critique of MacKinnon per se, but for the colonialist consequences of the universalization of women's subordination implied by western versions of feminism which disassociate gender oppression from racial, cultural, and geopolitical specificities.
- 13 In my own work I have tried to establish that incommensurability within gender theory by insisting on the incommensurability between gender norms and any lived effort to approximate its terms. In this sense, I have imported a Lacanian scheme into gender theory, although I have sought to retain something of the transformative possibilities associated with

gender as a social category, thus distancing myself from a Lacanian notion of the symbolic.

- 14 This appears to be a central concern of Joan W. Scott's forthcoming book *Women Who Have Only Para-*

doxes to Offer: French Feminists 1789–1944, in which she charts both the impossibility and necessity of women's claims to citizenship in the French Revolution and its aftermath.

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