

What did feminism and gender studies bring to psychoanalysis?

Compared to more mainstream political issues, the stakes of the feminist, gay and lesbian movements may have appeared marginal. In reality, they are of great importance because they put into question the legitimacy of political power, which—like all forms of power—has a theological-political foundation: this foundation has always been gendered: it is masculine and patriarchal; it is anti-feminine. Accordingly, the power's authority is threatened by the upheavals consequent to the growth of feminism.

Psychoanalysis was invented at the same time as the decline of the father began. For instance Freud, soon after returning from Paris in 1886, made a presentation claiming that hysteria was both masculine and feminine. He has provided the foundation of bisexuality early on in the "Three Essays" in 1903. He has shown in 1908 how much the institution of marriage was detrimental to women's desire. Since then, the research of early analysts, in particular women, have allowed new developments. Despite these revolutionary positions, some psychoanalytic hypotheses are now outdated or incomplete or simply erroneous. Freud's explanations are not always convincing when he addresses castration or *Penisneid* or when he maintains that the girl awaits the phallus from/of the father. Or again, when he considered perversion only from the perspective of the disavowal of maternal castration—while remaining discreet regarding the perversion of the father's desire. Other hypotheses made by Freud have been directly

contradicted by the present rise of women's liberation. For instance, Freud, regarding the issue of sublimation and the feminine super-ego, had been misled by the ideology of his time. Similar observations could be brought up about certain positions of Lacan or Levi-Strauss. It's a paradox, but I will try to show you that such critiques can renew psychoanalysis.

Some important issues are brought up by American feminism, but majority of their references is often from French feminism. The main issue is addressing the very definition of the "subject" of feminism—as well as the issue of a subject that would exist before the symbolic and before the "law." It is astonishing that starting from presuppositions that are different from Freud's, Judith Butler arrives at the same conclusions: it is impossible to define "woman." Their conclusions corroborate one another. Butler often uses the thesis of a "becoming of femininity" to be constructed, quoting de Beauvoir, "One is not born woman, one becomes woman," but she does not address that this is also a claim made by Freud, at about the same period as de Beauvoir, who makes this observation without explanation. For Butler, the problem is simple: because to speak about a "subject of feminism," one would have to have a definition of "woman."

As she writes, "feminism confronts the same political problem every time the word "woman" is supposed to denote one and same identity." Judith Butler asks, for example, the question: is being of feminine gender a "natural fact" or is it a "cultural performance?" Or we might ask the same question in a more interesting way: is this "naturalness" produced in a performative mode through speech acts that

follow discursive constraints in order to produce in turn the body, within and through categories of gender?" I wish to underscore right away the significance of the expression "cultural performance" because this idea is really close to the notion of "masquerade" brought to light by the psychoanalyst Joan Rivière. We find the same problem of definition in the very title of the book by Denise Riley, *Am I that Name? Feminism and the Category of Women* that reflects quite appropriately this undecidability. Yet it is on this strategic question that the capacity to gather "women" into a group depends!

The uncertainty is such that this difficulty of definition could be used itself as a definition and normative ideal! Judith Butler writes, for instance, that "if a subject unique to feminism remains to be constructed, it would be even more realistic to abandon such a project," since, she explains, "the category 'women' can only reach some stability and coherence within the heterosexual matrix..."

Nothing shows this difficulty better than the fragmentation of the feminist movement, or the opposition to feminism by a large number of women. Some theoreticians maintain that gender is a relationship, and not an individual attribute. Others, like Simone de Beauvoir, attest that the only gender to be labeled is femininity whereas the universal being is masculine. Luce Irigaray takes on a different position by declaring that women are *this sex that isn't one*: women would be unrepresentable, unthinkable—woman as Other, following a position that lyricizes and suits patriarchal rejection. For Irigaray, "the subject is always already masculine." For Monique Wittig, it is the opposite: gender is always already feminine, and there is only one. The masculine

is not sexuated, and women *are* gender. According to Monique Wittig, there is no such thing as two genders. There is only one: it is femininity; masculinity is the general, the universal point of view. But aren't these two positions equally true since every subject is primarily masculine (phallic) before becoming more or less feminine? In fact, we will agree each time with these different feminist positions, however contradictory. Because each one of them only emphasizes one of the phases of "becoming a woman" according to Freud.

This impossible definition meets the impossibility of defining "the woman" from a Freudian perspective, since this becoming comprises as well a masculinity complex, a bisexuality, and an inaccessible femininity, which allows for a masquerade of identity. For Butler, this masquerade is purely cultural, and this completely corresponds with the Freudian point of view: the masquerade is cultural indeed and not only in Joan Rivière's article. Butler even entertained the idea that the happenings of *drag queens* had a subversive role...

For reasons quite different from Freud, militant feminism does not define woman. I would add that for Freud, neither is there a definition of man, since masculinity is always asserted in contrast to femininity. Every definition of a gender is based upon an original bisexuality, without which by the way, there would be no choice. Yet it is true that to this relativity imposed upon both genders is added another difficulty for the feminine since it is only a "becoming" torn between two opposites, a masculinity in the beginning and a problematic feminine perspective—it's much easier for men—since they reject their femininity. It nevertheless results in an impossibility to define men

since masculinity is only defined by the rejection of femininity. The difficulty particular to the definition of woman does not mean “the woman does not exist,” this is a patriarchal point of view that has slipped into the debate by taking advantage of this difficulty of definition. An existence torn by contradiction is nevertheless an existence, which is even galvanized at every instant by this anti-essentialism.

I will now speak of the truly fundamental contribution of feminism and gender studies to psychoanalysis. This contribution concerns the issue of sexual gender choice. It happens that Freud, throughout his work, has addressed bisexuality, but along with him, or after him, almost no psychoanalyst has grasped the importance of this discovery. I am not sure if Lacan used this term even once. Feminism therefore makes a tremendous contribution to psychoanalysis by forcing it to seriously take into account what Freud wrote in “Some Psychic Consequences of the Anatomical Difference Between the Sexes”: “All human individuals, following their bisexual constitution [...] possess both masculine and feminine traits, so much that the content of theoretical constructions of pure femininity and masculinity remain uncertain.”

What then are the facts that make the reality of bisexuality so evident today? If a man can choose the feminine side and, conversely, a woman the masculine side, this choice presupposes that an original bisexuality was available to him or her. As Judith Butler writes and since this is about choice, it is a subjective performance, even if it is unconscious: “To say that the gendered body is performative means that

it does not have any ontological status independent of the different acts that constitute its reality.” Despite massive evidence today that have led to new legislations in many countries, a large contingent of psychoanalysis, regardless of orientation, has not taken this particular point of view of Freud seriously.

If Lacan often recognizes, particularly in the “Sexuation Mathemes,” that a “man” can fall under the column “woman” and vice versa, this mobility is an exception and does not proceed from a general principle, that of a psychic bisexuality which leads, for instance, every man to reject his primary feminization in relationship to a father, while a woman, on the contrary, more or less accepts it.

The acquisition of a gender is established in several steps that I will try to simplify. In the beginning, the immensity of maternal love imposes itself, but this attachment to the mother stifles and hinders all freedom. This position corresponds to “Being” mommy’s phallus. It’s really unbearable and even impossible! Wildly masturbating eases the push of the drive and frees one from the anxiety of *being* the maternal phallus, in order to instead *have* it well in hand. The initial moment of entering phallic jouissance is masturbatory, and both boys and girls begin by attaining jouissance equally from the phallus (penis or clitoris), starting from a primarily transgendered position. But masturbation itself leads to the anxiety of being punished, the consequence of which, I will show, will be the division into two psychic genders.

Masturbation is accompanied by a guilt that gives rise to the fantasy “a child is being beaten,” and from which the series of “fundamental fantasies” are unleashed. I’ve just mentioned the fantasy

of the “beaten child,” from which all fantasies originate. Since masturbation is guilty, a father is invented who threatens to strike the object of the crime—the penis or the clitoris— hence, a “fantasy of castration.” But as this punishment occurs at the same time as jouissance, this terrible child-beating father becomes a seducer: this is the “seduction fantasy,” a true traumatic crossroads for both genders, for if this seduction succeeded, it would be mortally incestuous. There is no other means of escaping this death by seduction than by putting into gear the “patricidal fantasy,” the focal point of secondary repression. If the penis, in erection, becomes a phallus through the father’s beating, it is soon to occur at the risk of becoming his wife, a marriage that is even more problematic as it is incestuous and therefore deadly.

It is quite remarkable that throughout this process, men, like women, are feminized (castrated) by the “father’s desire.” It is time to choose a gender: men are the rebels with weapons in hand and fantasize about a patricide. As for women, they are disarmed and exposed by their femininity, at least as long as they do not resist. In this sense, all women who do not commit suicide resist the paternal seduction. These two positions, masculine or feminine, in reaction to the “desire of the father,” require of each subject his or her gender choice, which does not always conform to anatomy and varies throughout one’s life. The choice of gender depends on the identification to either what the father desires, that is, a castrated daughter whom the father will marry; or, the second solution, to that which fiercely opposes the paternal desire for femininity, which defines consequently the masculine side. There is no other definition of masculinity than the rejection of femininity.

This “gender choice” does not say “who” is owner of the phallus, and therefore, erection is forever separate, under the blow of a castration that transforms it into a sort of unidentified flying object (UFO) fluttering between the two genders. None of them has it, except when it takes its gender, which leads to either giving it on the masculine side or to taking it on the feminine side.

In relationship to Freud, Lacan has made a useful clarification by formalizing a phallic symbol with a Greek letter (Φ) that cannot be reduced to the penis or to a series of equivalent objects. But we must follow through this to the end and add that, as such, neither man nor woman possesses the phallus. A man only has the phallus, that is to say the penis in erection, when he desires a woman who is, therefore, its owner as well. As a result, man is dispossessed of this phallus, which then does what it wants. It is the symbol of desire and castration. A man is not master of his erections, his impotence, his ejaculations, etc. The consequence of this clarification is that men, like women, are “castrated.” “To have” the phallus depends on the struggle between genders by either taking it or giving it. Thus, the phallus, phantom limb *par excellence* is the unique symbol of gender differences and the reason for their mutual concupiscence, oriented by the same hallucinatory wish: that of “having” it. To readdress now the critique by feminism, power is indeed patriarchal, masculine and heterosexual. But power is not phallogentric, and women owe their own power to the genius of the phallus.

As such, gender is indeed a “cultural” construction that does not occur in an autonomous fashion. This construction arises at the same

time as the invention of a beating then dead father, who has left in his wake—in the name of proof—hundreds of religions that attest to the spiritual nature of the father. This is the demonstration of the cultural importance of religions, which agrees with Butler's hypotheses regarding the cultural construction of gender. If there is a universal operator in these permutations, it isn't one incarnated by a "living, of father exception who would escape castration." Because this "father" is on principle fantasmatic: he is always dead and castrated. There is no so-called "exception" flying above, even in the mythical heavens of religion, where the sons' parricidal desire has propelled him. Only patriarchy dreams of a paternal exception.

I believe that the demonstration I just did is simple, but bisexuality is a challenging concept because it is difficult to understand that a gender can only be identified through the rejection of the other gender. The meaning of bisexuality is generally deformed, repressed and forgotten. It is not a double disposition, as if women remained a little bit men and the other way around. Neither is it a double sexual choice, like those who have sexual relations with both men and women. Bisexuality is, on the contrary, the precondition of choosing only one gender, most commonly quite assertively, but through the internal exclusion of the other gender—not only once, but at every moment, on an ongoing basis. This is the reason why Freud has so often written, regarding bisexuality, that it is a "predisposition," that is, in the background of this gender choice, necessary at every instant—a man is not always a man, and a woman not always a woman. A man can ever be so virile because he has rejected his femininity, and he really does not

seem bisexual! We must measure the tremendous importance of this process: this is really the very condition of an eroticized desire of one gender for the other. Sexual desire is not determined by hormones or by nature but by nothing other than this imperative predisposition at every instant: “you must choose your gender now!... therefore you must desire the other!

Bisexuality disappears once the choice of gender has been made, and bisexuality can only be recognized in the desire for the other gender. This choice keeps being actualized in the way one walks, speaks and even thinks, in thinking oneself a desired woman or, the opposite, a desiring man. The obsession for the other gender is a way of distributing in space one’s own bisexuality and to naturalize it by identifying with one of the two genders desiring the other. First, a rejection, then, the obsession of one’s desire follows.

The “naturalization” of the choice is so intense that, once chosen, the masculine or feminine gender becomes consubstantial with subjectivity! Bisexuality metamorphoses into desire and on a recurring basis. Yet the original bisexual conjunction continues to function, leading to a sort of ongoing rejection of the other gender, then to an obsessive desire for it, correlative to our thinking and acting existence. It is now time to answer to one of Judith Butler’s questions, when she asks if there is a subject prior to the Law, prior to the Symbolic. We can put forth that the Law and the Symbolic arise at the same time as the subject, to the rhythm of the subject’s guilt from his parricidal fantasy. Born at the same time as his guilt is repressed, the subject is right away gendered since he chooses his gender under the blow, the threat of the

father's incestuous desire, the father who pushes the subject to wish him dead. But this death wish brings forth a powerful repression that naturalizes right away the whole process that no law and no symbolic process precede. The subject is born at the same time as he internalizes the law and chooses a gender. Awareness, consciousness results only from this subjective birth.

I would like to point out the enormity of the theoretical work we are obligated to undertake, thanks to the critique by feminism. This critique requires us to first reconsider Freud's thesis on bisexuality, which have never really been utilized. But in the end, it is really our very conception of desire that we have to address with more depth. In the *Three Essays*, Freud remarks that his understanding of desire was not clear. Desire is of course primarily hallucinatory, like in the very first dreams of the infant. At night, he repeats in reverse the traumas of the day in order to get rid of them. Desire is first and foremost repetition. Later on, this hallucinated desire becomes sexualized in an after effect that is traumatic as well, that of seduction, which finds its conflictual solution in the masculine/feminine relationship. Sexual desire is a consequence of the splitting of bisexuality and its obsessive repetition: the subject of desire is the feminine and nothing else. It is not an object, but a subject. Desire does not have an object; its cause is the feminine.

This definition of sexual desire goes further: awareness consciousness is accompanied at every moment by the choice of gender, and consequently, thought in general will become gendered, determined by a masculine or feminine position. Moreover, thought unfolds to justify the gender: fantasy provides it with its grammar. "I think,

therefore I am a man.” “I am thought [of], therefore I am a woman.” The “I” of femininity is first and foremost masculine. This fundamental masculinity must be strongly underscored because women speak, and as the “I” that speaks is parricidal, it is for the sake of taking a masculine position that they do so and, as such, is, universal. We will therefore agree with Monique Wittig when she writes in *La marque du genre*: “No woman can say “I” if she does not take herself as a total subject, that is, without gender, universal, whole.” I will add, masculine. I do not see why women would not have the right to be masculine.” And because this thought becomes legitimate and enters awareness due to the spoken word, there exist characteristics of a “feminine voice” and of a “masculine voice.” These go equally for both men and women because women have first been men, which they remain.

We must now consider a few of the consequences of this “bisexual predisposition”: this means that any matching will be made as a function of bisexuality, that is, on the basis of a heterosexual background. Why work so hard to live as couples, if not to put a bit of order in this bisexual “predisposition,” which is quite exhausting when one lives alone. A “homosexual” couple will therefore cover up a latent heterosexuality, and, incidentally, in such couples, it is quite easy to guess who is masculine and who is feminine. Each one is for the other a different psychic gender, in particular during the transgressive moment of eroticism. Homosexuality displaces and reproduces the set up of the heterosexual couple, and the traditional sexual identities are redeployed in the gay and lesbian culture. For instance, writes Judith Butler: “the terms *butch, fem, girl*, as well as the parodic use of *dick, queer, and fag*,

redeploy and destabilize the categories of gender and those categories, which originally denigrated a homosexual identity.” Or in the same book *Gender Trouble*, “In lesbian communities, identification with the masculine of a butch identity is not a mere assimilation of lesbianism to heterosexuality. As lesbian *fems* explain, they love that their *boys* be *girls*, which means that a *girl* contextualizes and provides another meaning to the masculinity of the *butch* identity.”

I would like to say now that with this gender choice, there seems to be some kind of symmetry between masculine and feminine. And yet this is not the case because masculine identity is assured thanks to the rejection of the feminine, while on the feminine side, an uncertainty rules, not so much on the basis of Butler’s argument, but on the basis of the feminine “becoming” detailed by Freud. I will now explain how I understand this becoming.

This “feminine becoming” starts for Freud with feminine phallicism on the baseline, a phallicism that can remain fixated on an affirmation of masculinity more or less asserted. And some women do stay there. But it also happens that a girl may prefer to cancel or inhibit her entry into phallic jouissance, because of the guilt towards her mother whom she would deprive of her phallic being by masturbating. This blockage in entering phallic jouissance leads to complete frigidity. Will those women who do overcome such inhibition go towards some feminine apotheosis? The girl disappointed by her mother’s love would turn towards her father...which is possible only on the condition that he be present, and most importantly, that her mother does not make her feel overly guilty.

Afterwards though, the “father’s desire” would prevail. But this second position, that of a woman that is finally absolutely woman, would go back to conforming to the “father’s desire,” this means that this “total femininity” would be incestuous and therefore fatal. This last perspective of the “feminine becoming” is imposed itself as an impossible incestuous ideal, yet does so continuously. Mystic jouissance itself, far from being “supplementary,” remains articulated around the desire of the father, may he be eternal. Mystics find jouissance in God by repeating his name. They are truly women who have succeeded in not committing suicide. Confronted with incestuous anxiety, ordinary women would rather withdraw into a masculine position. They say no after having said yes. Then they become once gain fascinated by the father’s feminine ideal. On average, most remain stuck halfway, caught in the masculine/feminine symptomatic rhythmicity.

We are starting to realize the difficulty of “becoming feminine:” She would have to swap her masculine hat for a feminine one. But given the difficulty, she places the feminine hat on top of the masculine one: it is much safer! Such that the average path to femininity (seemingly in the majority) can be represented by the following question: “Am I a man or am I a woman?” Because the father wouldn’t be able to give her the phallus without seducing her,, without “killing” her by incest, unless he forfeited and died himself, a much-preferred orgiastic solution, although always a work in progress.

The last step of this becoming feminine, woman-woman, weighs on every moment and signifies seduction and incest at the same time. This “impossible” masquerade of femininity is femininity itself when it

seeks to resemble the point of fascination corresponding to men's desire: this is their own feminine aspect, which they reject and which fascinates them in the feminine masquerade. As long as she is alive, a woman is herself fascinated by this impossible feminine identification: she wonders how to dress, how to make herself up, how to live? She seeks out this appearance in magazines, and this imitation, as Butler says, is indeed a cultural performance. But it's a performance that must always be reworked.

The schema I just presented to you concerns the little girl. Many feminists have criticized it, first because it neglects the importance of the relationship to the mother, and especially because it is predictive: does a woman, after her adolescence, pursue her little girl destiny? We face a sort of black hole in Freud's theory, because, when one follows him, the man who is loved would only follow in his father's footsteps, a father from whom he awaits the phallus, and then a child. However, a rebellion against the father characterizes the passage from girl to woman: this is not a relay race! The adolescent confronts the father. True to the patriarchy of his century, Freud dismissed this time of rebellion. Maybe adolescence was less eruptive and shorter during his time since it was cut short by pregnancies and a new family life. If a man has a significant quality for a woman, it is that of ending his relationship with the father of his childhood! Obsessed with his own desire as father, Freud did not appreciate that during adolescence, a man's love does not prolong that of a father's love. This is a patriarchal blind spot because the prohibition of incest commands such a rupture, the exogamous condition of its feminine jouissance.

To finish up, I would like to discuss Judith Butler's input regarding cultural performance in the formatting of genders. This performance involves a kind of masquerade, which Butler calls "Imitation": this is obvious for the feminine but is also true for the masculine. I would like to compare this important contribution of Judith Butler with the notion of masquerade as it is mandated by the Freudian feminine becoming, and also by the masquerade according to Lacan, of which I have not yet spoken. In Lacan's conception, there is no resumption of the Freudian idea of a becoming. His main thesis concerning "the Woman" is quite simple. He has almost constantly returned to his definition in his article "The signification of the phallus." It consists in identifying the woman to the phallus. He also states this, for instance, in the formations of the unconscious by describing "this profound identification to the phallic signifier which is most tied to its femininity. He reaffirmed this position in *Preliminary questions to the possible treatment of psychosis*. The most exemplary quotation to illustrate what I am bringing up is as follows: "It is in order to be the phallus, that is, the signifier of the desire of the Other, that the woman will expel the essential of her femininity, particularly all its attributes into this masquerade." Thus, feminine identity is placed in a position trailing the mother-daughter relationship, moreover, in a version that pushes-to-psychosis.

I have tried to show the genealogy of the identification of the woman to the phallus because its ultimate consequence is the aphorism "the Woman does not exist." This proposition is true as long as it is concerned only with the last stage of the path towards femininity, an unreal ideal indeed. This is not a mistake of Lacan's but a borderline

case. Unfortunately, its global aspect erases the dialectic of the becoming woman. This proposition remains far from Freud's hesitation, he contented himself by writing that defining woman was out of reach.

I will not discuss here the validity of Lacan's thesis because one could object that neither woman nor anyone else can incarnate this being the phallus, even on the suicidal and transsexual horizon of psychoses. Every subject, from his birth, enters the dialectic of Having following the distinctive modes of masculine or feminine. A daughter could try to be her mother's phallic object but she wouldn't know how to achieve such end, and she hates her mother for this reason, as shown by psychotic anorexia—almost exclusively feminine – and her delusion of being poisoned (As you can read in Freud text : *On Femininity*). That femininity could be defined by an identification with the mother's desire, is also debatable. She differentiates herself on the contrary through the father's desire! The universal taboo of virginity, on the contrary, shows that the daughter is the object of the father's desire and not of her mother's, which she would try to fulfill. Nothing demonstrates this better than this extraordinary text in Freud's work: "The taboo of virginity." Young girls are possessed by the father's spirit and only sorcerers can deflower them. This is equally true for mystics.

I will therefore not try to figure out if Freud's hesitation might not be as enlightening as Lacan's claim. I will content myself here to take on a comparative task between the inexistence of "The woman" according to Lacan and the difficulties in defining the subject of American feminism, resulting from the plurality of possible definitions of femininity. This is also different from Freud's contradictory positions on

the feminine becoming. According to Lacan, it's "in essence" that "The woman" does not exist, and not because her becoming implies contrary identifications that prevent a unique definition, as she oscillates between the masculine and the feminine.

What does Butler's thesis bring to this debate on the cultural formatting of gender that is transformed as she says, into an imitation? If the woman is the phallus, then we understand right away the position of semblance and masquerade attributed to her by Lacan. This "masquerade" according to Lacan differs from the masquerade determined by the last phase woman-woman of the Freudian "becoming woman," since it is the very essence of woman that leads to semblance. The necessary masquerade to disguise oneself into the phallus is, according to Lacan, of a different order than the masquerade to which a woman devotes herself when she is seduced as the father's incestuous object, a cultural masquerade then. The choice of masquerade to which all women have access is that of a subject guided by a desire to be desired displaying the anonymous fetishes of the father's desire – like fashion for instance – while man is, also, in rivalry with this desire of the father: he is jealous of him and it excites him.

In conclusion, I will only say that these questions of feminism have allowed us to open once again a field of research that has been sclerotized for years, and which was by and large at the service of patriarchy.