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5. Identity, Sex, and the Metaphysics of Substance

Published by

Strouse, A.W.

Gender Trouble Couplets, Volume 1.

Punctum Books, 2019.

Project MUSE. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book.75674>.



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[74.48.170.251] Project MUSE (2025-01-01 16:14 GMT)

*Identity, Sex,
and the Metaphysics of Substance*

Oh! what is an Identity?
And what can ground the certainty
Identities are actual
and all are self-identical
persisting, as though they're the same—
coherent, single, with one name?
And even more importantly
does Gender have Identity?
We can't discuss Identity
unless we make an inquiry
into something that comes prior
which of course is human Gender
since never are there human Persons
except as we are gendered constructs.

It seems to me now that the notion
of Human Being as a Person
(as one who has some agency)
makes claims to an Ontology—
an argument about the Being
implicit in one's social Meaning.
And yet this takes elaboration
and questioning of the assumption
that actually the context social
exists outside (as an external)
with somehow a true Personhood
either already understood
as Consciousness or else as Reason
or as moral deliberation.
The question of Identity
is (within most Philosophy)
almost always one centered on
some internal criterion
presuming continuity
to Self as one Identity
(of just one Person throughout Time).
But such conjectures are not mine.

Instead I ask to what degree
do regulations that we see
as Gender's social formulation—
constructing its dualist division—
not constitute Identity
creating in reality
the mere coherence of Subjects

with their self-identical status?
Is it not that Identity
derives from Normativity
assigned as if it comes from Nature
when it's a descriptive feature?
In other words Identity
when seen as Continuity
is not a tick of Personhood
(as is thus often understood)
but it's a trick made socially
by norms constructed culturally
of intelligibility
dictating legibility.

In as much as Identity
is linked to Sexuality
as well as Sex and Gender norms
then in the way the Person forms
there is a problematic question
which is open to a deconstruction.
And now we track the emergence
of beings whose supposed coherence
appears to make them Persons, but
their Gender makes us wonder what
their essence is, which won't conform
to any culture's Gender norm
by which the Person is defined—
so we are caught up in a bind.

Genders are intelligible
and somehow they are integral
to structures institutional—
coherences relational—
maintaining their continual
Identities as Sexual
as Gendered and Desirable.
In other words there are Specters
of discontinuous vectors
produced and then prohibited
by Laws which all have limited
a Gender to perceived connection
of linking Sex with its Expression.

And yet by now I'm sure you know
that that's the point made by Foucault.
For as he ironically terms it
Sex's truth is made by the norms it
itself makes as Identity
in forming Sexuality.
Well Heterosexualization
always makes the instantiation
of a discursive opposition
between what's seen as Feminine
and what's construed as Masculine
(where these two terms are understood
as attributes of Personhood).
And yet the culture gives the Norms
by which all gendered selves have forms
and Norms require and insist

that selves can only then exist
when Gender follows from its Sex
as well when gender practices
should follow normatively either
the custom of their Sex or Gender:
Identity's relational
to structures, which (political
and made by the customs cultural)
would shape our sexualities.

Since some Gender Identities
must fail already to conform
to suit the letter of the norm
they seem impossibilities
or as it were monstrosities.
And yet these rare Identities
provide us opportunities
to open up the very terms
of identitarian norms.

When Identity is legible
and therefore it's intelligible,
that's when the matrix singular
creates it own peculiar
deep link within compulsory
Heterosexuality's
discursive regularities
that make up Sex Identities.
Identity's made by the force
of Power ruled through its Discourse.

Then is Gender Identity
not made by regulatory
and erstwhile a compulsory
Heterosexuality?

Or would maybe that explanation
actually be totalization
where Heterosexuality
just takes the place that logically
was held by Phallocentrism
as sole cause of all Sexism?

We learn from France whose Feminists
as well as her Post-Structuralists
make no agreement uniform
that would define that “Power” term.
Consider all the oppositions
among the various positions.
We have at first—I would not lie—
the views of Luce Irigaray
who says there is no Sex but One
(the Masculine whose production
opposes any other Gender
which simply is the male one’s Other.
And then as you are sure to know
there is the point made by Foucault
who sees both Masculinity
as well as Femininity
and even Sexuality
as all one single entity

built up by discursivity
of science and modernity.
And then of course I'd not renege
the work of one Monique Wittig
who keys Sex as a category
to the regime regulatory
of the condition compulsory
of Heterosexuality
constructed as the Feminine
by universal Masculine.
But Wittig as you surely know
agrees in essence with Foucault
that Sex will end when finally we
o'erthrow what's the Hegemony
of Heterosexuality.

These models each explanatory
show Sex as a category
but understood in different terms
of Power in its many forms.
So what's the possibility
that we can think complexity
of all these fields of power, or
how all them mash together; for
the theory of sexual difference
suggests that there's no real existence
granted the Female as a Subject
because she's totally the Object
within a representational
program or system conventional.

She's always the Representation
and hence without representation.
Irigary's Ontology
then argues somewhat subtly
a Woman's what can't simply be
because she is the very Difference
who's baked already into Essence —
she's not just the Opposite Sex
in contrast to manly Subjects
nor's she just the Opposite Gender
opposed to the Masculine Other —
she's really the economy
of Opposition's binary
(the secret, monologic plan
who's used constructing human Man).

Yet all agree despite difference
that Language makes from Sex Substance
or a self-identical Being
as though not a way of seeing.
Discourse conceals! We cannot be
a Sex or Gender essentially.
So now again I do not lie
when I say that Irigaray
would claim that Grammar's no index
of what is Gender or is Sex
for Grammar privileges the model
of Gender as the foundational
and Binary in opposition
between — within — representation.

Irigaray says that this Grammar
(subtending to its take on Gender)
assumes that Man and Masculine
and Woman and the Feminine
create a kind of Binary
which masks a higher harmony—
the singular Hegemony
of one sole Masculinity
that shuts up Femininity
as site of Multiplicity
against the Phallic Unity.

Also by now I'm sure you know
that Sex's Grammar for Foucault
imposes the Gender Binary
through a system regulatory
shrinking the Multiplicity
of any Sexuality
that might disrupt Hegemony.

Yet nor would I ever renege
on noting how Monique Wittig
examines Sex's Binary
in terms of a compulsory
Heterosexuality
and aims to squash that tyranny—
advancing a true Humanism
that's free from any rank sexism.
And elsewhere she views the promotion,
the profusion, indeed diffusion,

of all economies erotic
that are not strictly phallogentric
as ways that we might flatly free
Sex, Gender, and Identity.
And Wittig sees the Lesbian
as pushing back from restriction
of any Gender Binary
imposed by Sexuality.

But in her humanist assumption
the modes of all signification
as well as all representation
are not under interrogation.
But rather self-determination
affects the rehabilitation
of existential agency
granted to Lesbianity.
Therefore she won't critique the Subject
who is Patriarchy's Symbolic.
Effectively her argument
negotiates some replacement
of the universal Subject, Man
with a new one, the Lesbian.
So the Woman-Is-Sex equation
is just a Masculine conflation
encoding Femininity
as sexed Corporeality—
hence, a refusal to grant women
the freedom that's granted men.

To break Sex as this property
might phase out the misogyny
which makes Sex a synecdoche
for all of Femininity.

Gender Wittig sees as index
for the old opposition, Sex,
and claims there only is one Gender
which is used always in singular
where the Masculine is general
as a non-gendered Universal.
And Wittig calls for the destruction
of Sex as made by this construction
where Woman must assume the status
of Subjecthood that is denied us.
As we move toward that destruction
the Woman still must somehow function
as universal point of view
and as particular one, too.
So Wittig's view of the Lesbian
(replacing her in the Subject, Man)
confirms the normative promise
of Metaphysics of Substance
(the ideals of Humanist ethics).

So Wittig does not quite comply
with insights from Irigaray
but she defends that the presumed Person
who's equated perhaps with Freedom
assuming a status pre-social

for a freedom that's universal,
subscribing as well in essence
to a Metaphysics of Substance
responsible for the production
of Sex as a hidden construction.

Well the Metaphysics of Substance
is something that scholars would nuance
in discussions contemporary
of Nietzschean philosophy.
And in setting out to teach me
about works by Friedrich Nietzsche,
says Harr: the methodology
for building up Ontology
is trapped in Illusions of Being—
in fallacious, dumb ways of seeing—
mistaking Grammar's prerequisite
of the Subject and the Predicate
as though they were Reality
of some one true Identity
at levels of Ontology
(of Substance and of Attribute)—
Constructions Wittig would dispute
because they serve to institute
an Order and Simplicity
in some one true Identity.
They don't present and can't reveal
an Order that is really Real.

This criticism Nietzschean
explains the pickle we are in:
psychological categories
govern at last the theories
of Gender and Identity
and give to them Reality.
For Haar and for other such critics
this is a false Metaphysics
and offers critique of the notion
of Psychological Person
who's viewed as a substantive thing
(or — if you prefer — like *das Ding*).
Psychological categories
derive from false preliminaries
(assumptions of Identities)
which is the belief in Language
with all of its messy baggage.

Now Grammar made Descartes presume
ego cogito ergo sum.
But does “I” think? No! Certainly!
The truth is that thoughts come to me.
Really the Subject's false conception
merely arises from the fiction
that any kind of Unity
begins in words' Reality.

And as Wittig has shown moreover
there isn't a Language sans Gender.
Wittig analyzes the Grammar

of French as it pertains to Gender
and through this work in Wittig's eyes
this Gender not only qualifies
but constitutes the Episteme
by which this Gender we would deem
as somehow universalized.
(Although of course Wittig realized
it's not the same in French and English
this gendering grammatical-ish.)
Nevertheless the mark of Gender
is always just as Grammar's rendered
with Person always as a bearer
linguistically as some one Gender—
a primitive Ontology
that is a built-in Binary.
Arising from Ontology
this Gender is Philosophy.
And Wittig's views corroborated
by discourses so saturated
with implicit Ontology
in Sex and Sexuality.

The claim that one may simply be
a Sex or Sexuality
is clearly symptomatic
of Western metaphysical
assumptions about Substances
where Genders seem as Essences.
And in the case of men and women
this would subordinate the notion

of Gender to Identity
and furthermore the fallacy
that Person can a Gender be
presumes some state of prior Essence
that's coupled with presumed existence
or sense of self-identity
that's linked to Sexuality.

In a pre-feminist context
which would confuse Gender with Sex
Gender's a mode of Unity
for embodied Identity
opposed to some Sex Opposite
whose structure's a prerequisite
to build an oppositional
coherence individual
among Desire, Sex, and Gender,
inside a Self that they each render.

Assumption that one just can be
a given, sexed Anatomy
is undermined by observation
of gendered psychic disposition.
"I feel like a Woman" is true
because Aretha has sung "You
make me feel." So always the Other
invoked is an opposite Gender —
a formulation that coerces
the Binary it thus imposes.

Gender can be a Unity
of Sex and Sexuality
only when Sex is understood
as equal to what Gender would
and only when Desires be
Heteronormativity —
performed in terms of a relation
where Sex is made in opposition.
Indeed for Gender's Unity
there ALWAYS ALREADY needs must be
Heterosexuality.

Heterosexuality
produces uniformity
of gendered terms that constitute
a Binary we must refute.

Well there is a presupposition
within this very Gender relation
of a casual reproduction
of Sex and Sexuality
for Gender is Desire, or
Desire's Gender. Furthermore
within this certain Unity
constructed metaphysically
Sex, Gender, Sexuality —
with each one in this Trinity
now all unlocked by just one key:
Heterosexuality.

A naturalistic paradigm
where Sex and Gender intertwine
with these in continuity
to lusting Sexuality
as basis of Identity
and for a paradigm expressive
which sees the Self as successive
to Sex and Gender and Desire
and not to such expression prior—
are both what Luce Irigaray
(I paraphrase but do not lie)
sees as a wish to reify.

This sketch of Gender gives a clue
for the substantializing view
and its deeper Metaphysics
as linked to Power Politics.
The institutionalization
of the rank compulsory
Heterosexuality
requires Gender's Binary
with one term, Masculinity
demarcated from Femininity—
a demarcation overall
clearly Heterosexual.

And then this differentiation
of two intertwined oppositions
creates a strong consolidation
or a presumptive Unity

both within Masculinity
and in Femininity
through terms of Sexuality.

Now the displacement strategy
of relational Binary
form of its ontological stance
(the Metaphysics of Substance)
claims Gender's dueling categories
are made within its binaries.
And then I'm sure that you will know
that that's implicit in Foucault:
Sex, he says, as category
is product of an inventory
produced within Modernity
by modes of Sexuality.
And the strange, tactical production
of that old, discursive construction
of our Sex within a Binary
conceals of course the primary
aims of the secret apparatus
which postulates that both the Sexes
are cause of Sexuality.
Here's a conclusion that he draws:
"It is an effect that seems the cause."
Regimes of Sexuality
by functioning discursively
instate the Gender Binary
and thus make Sex a category.

In an intro Foucault would write
to notes by a hermaphrodite
(a certain Herculine Barbin
whose journals—in Foucault’s jargon—
show “practices” that would critique
Modernity and its technique).
Heterosexuality—
which cannot grasp an Identity
that thwarts its Sexuality.

From norms this Herculine departs
having both male and female parts.
Moreso the system just has shelves
for filing certain gendered Selves.
And those conventions that produce
a Self in terms of Sex, reduce
the Self to either He or She—
a frame that Herculine’d exceed
since Herculine deploys the terms
of Gender using “both” its forms
and thus exceeds the finery
set up by Gender’s Binary.
Conversing disconcertingly,
Heterosexuality
and Homosexuality
are advanced anatomically
in a discontinuity
of Heterogeneity
that’s cut off paradoxically.
by “Hetero”-sexuality

(undermining subversively
that Metaphysics of Substance
once seen as the very Essence
of identitarian Sex).

Foucault sees Herculine's ex-
perience as some Pleasures that
are like the "grin" without the "cat!"
And Pleasures thus are figured here
as qualities that don't adhere
to any abiding Substance
which thus suggests the happenstance
of all gendered experience
not apprehended as Substance
or the hierarchical Grammar
of a Noun and Modifier.

Through this reading of Herculine
our Foucault claims that he has seen
exposure ontological
of attributes accidental
and postulates Identity
as restricted culturally
in principles of hierarchy.
And this insight wholly dispenses
with Genders any Substances
so it's no longer possible
to hold the gendered Subject whole
subsuming Gender dissonance
into a prior essence, as

if men might act quite Feminine
yet with some manly underpin
(a “man” who is Ontology
or figure of Biology).
But the notion of this Substance
is just a fictitious essence
produced through the compulsory
construction of coherency
which orders neatly Attributes
into the Gender Absolutes.

And so it seems this dissonance
must undermine the Substance stance.
Appearance of a Self that’s gendered
is by a Regulation rendered
which marshals forced coherences
into some fictive Substances.
The exposure of this production
as made by Regulation
by resisting assimilation
with attributes, or any quirk
transgressing the same old framework
as certain dissonant Adjectives
would redefine the Substances
(the Nouns that they would modify).
And so we may hypothesi
that this explodes as forgeries
all of Gender’s categories
since they include what they exclude
(as we quite rightly must conclude).

But if supposed Substances
are nothing but coherences
of contingently made construction,
of attribute in regulation,
then the very Ontology
is formed quite artificially
and so a superfluity.

So as this now is broken down
we see that Gender's not a Noun.
But neither is it made from sets
of some free-floating sobriquets.
We can't deny that its effect
is made within the old Subject
(mainly when performatively
it is imposed coercively
when Power wants coherency).

In Metaphysics of Substance
a Gender's merely Performance
which makes up that Identity
that Gender would presume to be.

In the terms that I'm construing
Gender simply is a Doing
and not the doing of a Subject
who before the Deed could exist.
In the project liberatory
of thinking the category—
outside Metaphysics of Substance—

there is certainly relevance
for what some critics would teach me
about words by Friedrich Nietzsche.
“There is no Being just the Deed.”

Now Nietzsche might not have agreed
but let me state a corollary:
There is no Gender category
and no Gender Identity
behind Performativity
and this makes the very expression
that’s presumed to have been their Essence.

