Melancholy Gender / Refused Identification

In grief the world becomes poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself. — Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia"

How is it then that in melancholia the super-ego can become a gathering-place for the death instincts?
— Freud, The Ego and the Id

It may at first seem strange to think of gender as a kind of melancholy, or as one of melancholy's effects. But let us remember that in The Ego and the Id Freud himself acknowledged that melancholy, the unfinished process of grieving, is central to the formation of the identifications that form the ego. Indeed, identifications formed from unfinished grief are the modes in which the lost object is incorporated and phantasmatically preserved in and as the ego. Consider in conjunction with this insight Freud's further remark that "the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego," not merely a surface, but "the projection of a surface." Further, this bodily ego assumes a gendered morphology, so that the bodily ego is also a gendered ego. I hope first to explain the sense in which a melancholic identification is central to the process whereby the ego assumes a gendered character. Second, I want to explore how this analysis of the melancholic formation of gender sheds light on the predicament of living within a culture which can mourn the loss of homosexual attachment only with great difficulty.

Reflecting on his speculations in "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud writes in The Ego and the Id that in the earlier essay he had supposed that "an object which was lost has been set up again inside the ego—that is, that an object-cathexis had been replaced by an identification. At that time, however," he continued, "we did not appreciate the full significance of this process and did not know how common and how typical it is. Since then we have come to understand that this kind of substitution has a great share in determining the form taken by the ego and that it makes an essential contribution toward building up what is called its 'character'" (p. 28). Slightly later in the same text, Freud expands this view: "when it happens that a person has to give up a sexual object, there quite often ensues an alteration of his ego which can only be described as a setting up of the object inside the ego, as it occurs in melancholia" (29). He concludes this discussion by speculating that "it may be that this identification is the sole condition under which the id can give up its objects . . . it makes it possible to suppose that the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object-choices" (29). What Freud here calls the "character of the ego" appears to be the sedimentation of objects loved and lost, the archaeological remainder, as it were, of unresolved grief.

What is perhaps most striking about his formulation here is how it reverses his position in "Mourning and Melancholia" on what it means to resolve grief. In the earlier essay, Freud
assumes that grief can be resolved through a de-cathexis, a breaking of attachment, as well as the subsequent making of new attachments. In *The Ego and the Id*, he makes room for the notion that melancholic identification may be a prerequisite for letting the object go. By claiming this, he changes what it means to "let an object go," for there is no final breaking of the attachment. There is, rather, the incorporation of the attachment as identification, where identification becomes a magical, a psychic form of preserving the object. Insofar as identification is the psychic preserve of the object and such identifications come to form the ego, the lost object continues to haunt and inhabit the ego as one of its constitutive identifications. The lost object is, in that sense, made coextensive with the ego itself. Indeed, one might conclude that melancholic identification permits the loss of the object in the external world precisely because it provides a way to preserve the object as part of the ego and, hence, to avert the loss as a complete loss. Here we see that letting the object go means, paradoxically, not full abandonment of the object but transferring the status of the object from external to internal. Giving up the object becomes possible only on the condition of a melancholic internalization or, what might for our purposes turn out to be even more important, a melancholic incorporation.

If in melancholia a loss is refused, it is not for that reason abolished. Internalization preserves loss in the psyche; more precisely, the internalization of loss is part of the mechanism of its refusal. If the object can no longer exist in the external world, it will then exist internally, and that internalization will be a way to disavow the loss, to keep it at bay, to stay or postpone the recognition and suffering of loss.

Is there a way in which gender identifications or, rather, the identifications that become central to the formation of gender, are produced through melancholic identification? It seems clear that the positions of "masculine" and "feminine," which Freud, in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), understood as the effects of laborious and uncertain accomplishment, are established in part through prohibitions which demand the loss of certain sexual attachments, and demand as well that those losses not be avowed, and not be grieved. If the assumption of femininity and the assumption of masculinity proceed through the accomplishment of an always tenuous heterosexuality, we might understand the force of this accomplishment as mandating the abandonment of homosexual attachments or, perhaps more trenchantly, preempting the possibility of homosexual attachment, a foreclosure of possibility which produces a domain of homosexuality understood as unlivable passion and ungrievable loss. This heterosexuality is produced not only through implementing the prohibition on incest but, prior to that, by enforcing the prohibition on homosexuality. The oedipal conflict presumes that heterosexual desire has already been accomplished, that the distinction between heterosexual and homosexual has been enforced (a distinction which, after all, has no necessity); in this sense, the prohibition on incest presupposes the prohibition on homosexuality, for it presumes the heterosexualization of desire.

To accept this view we must begin by presupposing that masculine and feminine are not dispositions, as Freud sometimes argues, but indeed accomplishments, ones which emerge in tandem with the achievement of heterosexuality. Here Freud articulates a cultural logic whereby gender is achieved and stabilized through heterosexual positioning, and where threats to heterosexuality thus become threats to gender itself. The prevalence of this heterosexual matrix in the construction of gender emerges not only in Freud's text, but in the cultural
forms of life that have absorbed this matrix and are inhabited by everyday forms of gender anxiety. Hence, the fear of homosexual desire in a woman may induce a panic that she is losing her femininity, that she is not a woman, that she is no longer a proper woman, that if she is not quite a man, she is like one, and hence monstrous in some way. Or in a man, the terror of homosexual desire may lead to a terror of being construed as feminine, feminized, of no longer being properly a man, of being a “failed” man, or being in some sense a figure of monstrosity or abjection.

I would argue that phenomenologically there are many ways of experiencing gender and sexuality that do not reduce to this equation, that do not presume that gender is stabilized through the installation of a firm heterosexuality, but for the moment I want to invoke this stark and hyperbolic construction of the relation between gender and sexuality in order to think through the question of ungrieved and ungrieveable loss in the formation of what we might call the gendered character of the ego.

Consider that gender is acquired at least in part through the repudiation of homosexual attachments; the girl becomes a girl through being subject to a prohibition which bars the mother as an object of desire and installs that barred object as a part of the ego, indeed, as a melancholic identification. Thus the identification contains within it both the prohibition and the desire, and so embodies the ungrieved loss of the homosexual cathexis. If one is a girl to the extent that one does not want a girl, then wanting a girl will bring being a girl into question; within this matrix, homosexual desire thus panics gender.

Heterosexuality is cultivated through prohibitions, and these prohibitions take as one of their objects homosexual attachments, thereby forcing the loss of those attachments. If the girl is to transfer love from her father to a substitute object, she must, according to Freudian logic, first renounce love for her mother, and renounce it in such a way that both the aim and the object are foreclosed. She must not transfer that homosexual love onto a substitute feminine figure, but renounce the possibility of homosexual attachment itself. Only on this condition does a heterosexual aim become established as what some call a sexual orientation. Only on the condition of this foreclosure of homosexuality can the father and substitutes for him become objects of desire, and the mother become the uneasy site of identification.

Becoming a “man” within this logic requires repudiating femininity as a precondition for the heterosexualization of sexual desire and its fundamental ambivalence. If a man becomes heterosexual by repudiating the feminine, where could that repudiation live except in an identification which his heterosexual career seeks to deny? Indeed, the desire for the feminine is marked by that repudiation: he wants the woman he would never be. He wouldn’t be caught dead being her; therefore he wants her. She is his repudiated identification (a repudiation he sustains as at once identification and the object of his desire). One of the most anxious aims of his desire will be to elaborate the difference between him and her, and he will seek to discover and install proof of that difference. His wanting will be haunted by a dread of being what he wants, so that his wanting will also always be a kind of dread. Precisely because what is repudiated and hence lost is preserved as a repudiated identification, this desire will attempt to overcome an identification which can never be complete.

Indeed, he will not identify with her, and he will not desire another man. That refusal to desire, that sacrifice of desire
under the force of prohibition, will incorporate homosexuality as an identification with masculinity. But this masculinity will be haunted by the love it cannot grieve, and before I suggest how this might be true, I’d like to situate the kind of writing that I have been offering as a certain cultural engagement with psychoanalytic theory that belongs neither to the fields of psychology nor to psychoanalysis, but which nevertheless seeks to establish an intellectual relationship to those enterprises.

Thus far, I have been offering something like an exegesis of a certain psychoanalytic logic, one that appears in some psychoanalytic texts but which these texts and others also sometimes contest. I make no empirical claims, nor attempt a survey of current psychoanalytic scholarship on gender, sexuality, or melancholy. I want merely to suggest what I take to be some productive convergences between Freud’s thinking on ungrieved and ungrievable loss and the predicament of living in a culture which can mourn the loss of homosexual attachment only with great difficulty.

This problematic is made all the more acute when we consider the ravages of AIDS, and the task of finding a public occasion and language in which to grieve this seemingly endless number of deaths. More generally, this problem makes itself felt in the uncertainty with which homosexual love and loss is regarded: is it regarded as a “true” love, a “true” loss, a love and loss worthy and capable of being grieved, and thus worthy and capable of having been lived? Or is it a love and a loss haunted by the specter of a certain unreality, a certain unthinkable, the double disavowal of the “I never loved her, and I never lost her,” uttered by a woman, the “I never loved him, I never lost him,” uttered by a man? Is this the “never-never” that supports the naturalized surface of heterosexual life as well as its pervasive melancholia? Is it the disavowal of loss by which sexual formation, including gay sexual formation, proceeds?

If we accept the notion that the prohibition on homosexuality operates throughout a largely heterosexual culture as one of its defining operations, then the loss of homosexual objects and aims (not simply this person of the same gender, but any person of the same gender) would appear to be foreclosed from the start. I say “foreclosed” to suggest that this is a preemptive loss, a mourning for un livelihood possibilities. If this love is from the start out of the question, then it cannot happen, and if it does, it certainly did not. If it does, it happens only under the official sign of its prohibition and disavowal. When certain kinds of losses are compelled by a set of culturally prevalent prohibitions, we might expect a culturally prevalent form of melancholia, one which signals the internalization of the ungrieved and ungrievable homosexual cathexis. And where there is no public recognition or discourse through which such a loss might be named and mourned, then melancholia takes on cultural dimensions of contemporary consequence. Of course, it comes as no surprise that the more hyperbolic and defensive a masculine identification, the more fierce the ungrieved homosexual cathexis. In this sense, we might understand both “masculinity” and “femininity” as formed and consolidated through identifications which are in part composed of disavowed grief.

If we accept the notion that heterosexuality naturalizes itself by insisting on the radical otherness of homosexuality, then heterosexual identity is purchased through a melancholic incorporation of the love that it disavows: the man who insists upon the coherence of his heterosexuality will claim that he never loved another man, and hence never lost another man. That love, that attachment becomes subject to a double dis-
avowal, a never having loved, and a never having lost. This "never-never" thus funds the heterosexual subject, as it were; it is an identity based upon the refusal to avow an attachment and, hence, the refusal to grieve.

There is perhaps a more culturally instructive way of describing this scenario, for it is not simply a matter of an individual’s unwillingness to avow and hence to grieve homosexual attachments. When the prohibition against homosexuality is culturally pervasive, then the "loss" of homosexual love is precipitated through a prohibition which is repeated and ritualized throughout the culture. What ensues is a culture of gender melancholy in which masculinity and femininity emerge as the traces of an ungrieved and ungrievable love; indeed, where masculinity and femininity within the heterosexual matrix are strengthened through the repudiations that they perform. In opposition to a conception of sexuality which is said to "express" a gender, gender itself is here understood to be composed of precisely what remains inarticulate in sexuality.

If we understand gender melancholy in this way, then perhaps we can make sense of the peculiar phenomenon whereby homosexual desire becomes a source of guilt. In "Mourning and Melancholia" Freud argues that melancholy is marked by the experience of self-beratements. He writes, "If one listens carefully to the many and various self-accusations of the melancholic, one cannot in the end avoid the impression that often the most violent of them are hardly at all applicable to the patient himself, but that with insignificant modifications they do fit someone else, some person whom the patient loves, has loved or ought to love . . . the self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted on to the patient’s own ego." 

Refused Identification

Freud goes on to conjecture that the conflict with the other which remains unresolved at the time the other is lost re-emerges in the psyche as a way of continuing the quarrel. Indeed, anger at the other is doubtless exacerbated by the death or departure which occasions the loss. But this anger is turned inward and becomes the substance of self-beratement.

In "On Narcissism," Freud links the experience of guilt with the turning back into the ego of homosexual libido. Putting aside the question of whether libido can be homosexual or heterosexual, we might rephrase Freud and consider guilt as the turning back into the ego of homosexual attachment. If the loss becomes a renewed scene of conflict, and if the aggression that follows from that loss cannot be articulated or externalized, then it rebounds upon the ego itself, in the form of a super-ego. This will eventually lead Freud to link melancholic identification with the agency of the super-ego in The Ego and the Id, but already in "On Narcissism" we have some sense of how guilt is wrought from ungrievable homosexuality.

The ego is said to become impoverished in melancholia, but it appears as poor precisely through the workings of self-beratements. The ego-ideal, what Freud calls the "measure" against which the ego is judged by the super-ego, is precisely the ideal of social rectitude defined over and against homosexuality. "This ideal," Freud writes, "has a social side: it is also the common ideal of a family, a class or a nation. It not only binds the narcissistic libido, but also a considerable amount of the person’s homosexual libido, which in this way becomes turned back into the ego. The dissatisfaction due to the non-fulfillment of this ideal liberates homosexual libido, which is transformed into a sense of guilt (dread of the community)" (81).

But the movement of this "transformation" is not altogether
clear. After all, Freud will argue in Civilization and Its Discontents that these social ideals are transformed into a sense of guilt through a kind of internalization which is not, ultimately, mimetic. In “On Narcissism,” it is not that one treats oneself as harshly as one was treated but rather that the aggression toward the ideal and its unfulfillability is turned inward, and this self-aggression becomes the primary structure of conscience: “by means of identification [the child] takes the unattackable authority into himself” (86).

In this sense, in melancholia the super-ego can become a gathering place for the death instincts. As such, it is not necessarily the same as those instincts or their effect. In this way, melancholia attracts the death instincts to the super-ego, the death instincts being understood as a regressive striving toward organic equilibrium, and the self-beratement of the super-ego being understood to make use of that regressive striving for its own purposes. Melancholy is both the refusal of grief and the incorporation of loss, a mirroring of the death it cannot mourn. Yet the incorporation of death draws upon the death instincts to such a degree that we might well wonder whether the two can be separated from one another, whether analytically or phenomenologically.

The prohibition on homosexuality preempts the process of grief and prompts a melancholic identification which effectively turns homosexual desire back upon itself. This turning back upon itself is precisely the action of self-beratement and guilt. Significantly, homosexuality is not abolished but preserved, though preserved precisely in the prohibition on homosexuality. In Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud makes clear that conscience requires the continuous sacrifice or renunciation of instinct to produce the peculiar satisfaction that conscience requires; conscience is never assuaged by renunciation, but is paradoxically strengthened (“renunciation breeds intolerance”). Renunciation does not abolish the instinct; it deploys the instinct for its own purposes, so that prohibition, and the lived experience of prohibition as repeated renunciation, is nourished precisely by the instinct that it renounces. In this scenario, renunciation requires the very homosexuality that it condemns, not as its external object, but as its own most treasured source of sustenance. The act of renouncing homosexuality thus paradoxically strengthens homosexuality, but it strengthens homosexuality precisely as the power of renunciation. Renunciation becomes the aim and vehicle of satisfaction. And it is, we might conjecture, precisely the fear of setting homosexuality loose from this circuit of renunciation that so terrifies the guardians of masculinity in the U.S. military. What would masculinity “be” without this aggressive circuit of renunciation from which it is wrought? Gays in the military threaten to undo masculinity only because this masculinity is made of repudiated homosexuality?

Some suggestions I made in Bodies That Matter can facilitate the transition from the consideration of melancholia as a specifically psychic economy to the production of the circuitry of melancholia as part of the operation of regulatory power. If melancholia designates a sphere of attachment that is not explicitly produced as an object of discourse, then it erodes the operation of language that not only posits objects, but regulates and normalizes objects through that positing. If melancholia appears at first to be a form of containment, a way of internalizing an attachment that is barred from the world, it also establishes the psychic conditions for regarding “the world” itself as contingently organized through certain kinds of foreclosures.

Having described a melancholy produced through the com-
pulsory production of hetereosexuality, thus, a hetereosexual melancholy that one might read in the workings of gender itself, I want now to suggest that rigid forms of gender and sexual identification, whether homossexual or heterosexual, appear to spawn forms of melancholy. I would like first to reconsider the theory of gender as performative that I elaborated in Gender Trouble, and then to turn to the question of gay melancholia and the political consequences of un grievable loss.

There I argued that gender is performative, by which I meant that no gender is “expressed” by actions, gestures, or speech, but that the performance of gender produces retroactively the illusion that there is an inner gender core. That is, the performance of gender retroactively produces the effect of some true or abiding feminine essence or disposition, so that one cannot use an expressive model for thinking about gender. Moreover, I argued that gender is produced as a ritualized repetition of conventions, and that this ritual is socially compelled in part by the force of a compulsory heterosexuality. In this context, I would like to return to the question of drag to explain in clearer terms how I understand psychoanalysis to be linked with gender performativity, and how I take performativity to be linked with melancholia.

It is not enough to say that gender is performed, or that the meaning of gender can be derived from its performance, whether or not one wants to rethink performance as a compulsory social ritual. Clearly there are workings of gender that do not “show” in what is performed as gender, and to reduce the psychic workings of gender to the literal performance of gender would be a mistake. Psychoanalysis insists that the opacity of the unconscious sets limits to the exteriorization of the psyche. It also argues—rightly, I think—that what is exteriorized or performed can only be understood by reference to what is barred from performance, what cannot or will not be performed.

The relation between drag performances and gender performativity in Gender Trouble goes something like this: when a man is performing drag as a woman, the “imitation” that drag is said to be is taken as an “imitation” of femininity, but the “femininity” that he imitates is not understood as being itself an imitation. Yet if one considers that gender is acquired, that it is assumed in relation to ideals which are never quite inhabited by anyone, then femininity is an ideal which everyone always and only “imitates.” Thus, drag imitates the imitative structure of gender, revealing gender itself to be an imitation. However attractive this formulation may have seemed, it didn’t address the question of how certain forms of disavowal and repudiation come to organize the performance of gender. How is the phenomenon of gender melancholia to be related to the practice of gender performativity?

Moreover, given the iconic figure of the melancholic drag queen, one might ask whether there is not a dissatisfied longing in the mimetic incorporation of gender that is drag. Here one might ask also after the disavowal which occasions the performance and which performance might be said to enact, where performance engages “acting out” in the psychoanalytic sense. If melancholia in Freud’s sense is the effect of an un grievied loss, performance, understood as “acting out,” may be related to the problem of unacknowledged loss. If there is an un grievied loss in drag performance, perhaps it is a loss that is refused and incorporated in the performed identification, one which reiterates a gendered idealization and its radical uninhabitatibility. This is, then, neither a territorialization of the feminine by the masculine nor a sign of the essential plasticity of gender. It suggests that the performance allegorizes a
loss it cannot grieve, allegorizes the incorporative fantasy of melancholia whereby an object is phantasmatically taken in or on as a way of refusing to let it go. Gender itself might be understood in part as the “acting out” of unresolved grief.

The above analysis is a risky one because it suggests that for a “man” performing femininity, or for a “woman” performing masculinity (the latter is always, in effect, to perform a little less, given that femininity is cast as the spectacular gender), there is an attachment to—and a loss and refusal of—the figure of femininity by the man, or the figure of masculinity by the woman. It is important to underscore that, although drag is an effort to negotiate cross-gendered identification, cross-gendered identification is not the only paradigm for thinking about homosexuality, merely one among others. Drag allegorizes some set of melancholic incorporative fantasies that stabilize gender. Not only are a vast number of drag performers straight, but it would be a mistake to think that homosexuality is best explained through the performativity that is drag. What does seem useful in this analysis, however, is that drag exposes or allegorizes the mundane psychic and performatory practices by which heterosexualized genders form themselves through renouncing the possibility of homosexuality, a foreclosure which produces both a field of heterosexual objects and a domain of those whom it would be impossible to love. Drag thus allegorizes heterosexual melancholy, the melancholy by which a masculine gender is formed from the refusal to grieve the masculine as a possibility of love; a feminine gender is formed (taken on, assumed) through the incorporative fantasy by which the feminine is excluded as a possible object of love, an exclusion never grieved, but “preserved” through heightened feminine identification. In this sense, the “truest”

lesbian melancholic is the strictly straight woman, and the “truest” gay male melancholic is the strictly straight man.

What drag does expose, however, is that in the “normal” constitution of gender presentation, the gender that is performed is constituted by a set of disavowed attachments, identifications which constitute a different domain of the “unperformable.” Indeed, what constitutes the sexually unperformable may—but need not—be performed as gender identification. To the extent that homosexual attachments remain unacknowledged within normative heterosexuality, they are not merely constituted as desires which emerge and subsequently become prohibited; rather, these desires are proscribed from the start. And when they do emerge on the far side of the censor, they may well carry the mark of impossibility with them, performing, as it were, as the impossible within the possible. As such, they will not be attachments that can be openly grieved. This is, then, less a refusal to grieve (the Mitscherlich formulation that accents the choice involved) than a preemption of grief performed by the absence of cultural conventions for avowing the loss of homosexual love. And this absence produces a culture of heterosexual melancholy, one which can be read in the hyperbolic identifications by which mundane heterosexual masculinity and femininity confirm themselves. The straight man becomes (mimes, cites, appropriates, assumes the status of) the man he “never” loved and “never” grieved; the straight woman becomes the woman she “never” loved and “never” grieved. It is in this sense, then, that what is most apparently performed as gender is the sign and symptom of a pervasive disavowal.

Gay melancholia, however, also contains anger that can be translated into political expression. It is precisely to counter
this pervasive cultural risk of gay melancholia (what the newspapers generalize as "depression") that there has been an insistent publicization and politicization of grief over those who have died from AIDS. The Names Project Quilt is exemplary, ritualizing and repeating the name itself as a way of publically avowing limitless loss.\textsuperscript{12}

Insofar as the grief remains unspeakable, the rage over the loss can redouble by virtue of remaining unavowed. And if that rage is publically proscribed, the melancholic effects of such a proscription can achieve suicidal proportions. The emergence of collective institutions for grieving are thus crucial to survival, to reassembling community, to rearticulating kinship, to reweaving sustaining relations. Insofar as they involve the publicization and dramatization of death—as in the case of "die-ins" by Queer Nation—they call for being read as life-affirming rejoinders to the dire psychic consequences of a grieving process culturally thwarted and proscribed.\textsuperscript{11}

Melancholy can work, however, within homosexuality in specific ways that call for rethinking. Within the formation of gay and lesbian identity, there may be an effort to disavow a constitutive relationship to heterosexuality. When this disavowal is understood as a political necessity in order to specify gay and lesbian identity over and against its ostensible opposite, heterosexuality, that cultural practice paradoxically culminates in a weakening of the very constituency it is meant to unite. Not only does such a strategy attribute a false and monolithic status to heterosexuality, but it misses the political opportunity to work on the weakness in heterosexual subjectivation and to refute the logic of mutual exclusion by which heterosexism proceeds. Moreover, a full-scale denial of the interrelationship can constitute a rejection of heterosexu-

ality that is to some degree an identification \textit{with} a rejected heterosexuality. Important to this economy, however, is the refusal to recognize this identification that is, as it were, already made, a refusal which absentely designates the domain of a specifically gay melancholia, a loss which cannot be recognized and, hence, cannot be mourned. For a gay or lesbian identity position to sustain its appearance as coherent, heterosexuality must remain in that rejected and repudiated place. Paradoxically, its heterosexual \textit{remains} must be \textit{sustained} precisely through insisting on the seamless coherence of a specifically gay identity. Here it should become clear that a radical refusal to identify suggests that on some level an identification has already taken place, an identification has been made and disavowed, whose symptomatic appearance is the insistence, the overdetermination of the identification that is, as it were, worn on the body that shows.

This raises the political question of the cost of articulating a coherent identity position by producing, excluding, and repudiating a domain of abjected specters that threaten the arbitrarily closed domain of subject positions. Perhaps only by risking the \textit{incoherence} of identity is connection possible, a political point that correlates with Leo Bersani's insight that only the decentered subject is available to desire.\textsuperscript{13} What cannot be avowed as a constitutive identification for any given subject position runs the risk not only of becoming externalized in a degraded form, but repeatedly repudiated and subject to a policy of disavowal.

The logic of repudiation that I've charted here is in some ways a hyperbolic theory, a logic in drag, as it were, which overstates the case, but overstates it for a reason. There is no necessary reason for identification to oppose desire, or for desire to be fueled by repudiation. This remains true for
heterosexuality and homosexuality alike, and for forms of bisexuality that take themselves to be composite forms of each. Indeed, we are made all the more fragile under the pressure of such rules, and all the more mobile when ambivalence and loss are given a dramatic language in which to do their acting out.

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Keeping It Moving

*Commentary on Judith Butler’s “Melancholy Gender / Refused Identification”*

ADAM PHILLIPS

Ends of sentences and other pauses only come when we run out of time or hope.
—Carolyn Creedon, *The Best American Poetry*

If, as Freud suggests, character is constituted by identification—the ego likening itself to what it once loved—then character is close to caricature, an imitation of an imitation. Like the artists Plato wanted to ban, we are making copies of copies, but unlike Plato’s artists we have no original, only an infinite succession of likenesses to someone who, to all intents and purposes, does not exist. Freud’s notion of character is a parody of a Platonic work of art; his theory of character formation through identification makes a mockery of character as in any way substantive. The ego is always dressing up for somewhere to go. Insofar as being is being like, there can be
man's analysis sheds light on the "voice" of ideology insofar as the subject who turns around already knows the voice to which he responds, suggesting an irreducible ambiguity between the "voice" of conscience and the "voice" of the law.


12. One might usefully compare Max Weber’s The Protestant Ethic with Althusser on this point. In both, labor is effectively guaranteed through a Christian ethic, although in Althusser the religious inclination appears to be more Catholic than Protestant.

13. Pierre Bourdieu elaborates the concept of the habitus in The Logic of Practice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 66–79, where he analyzes the embodied rituals of everydayness by which a given culture produces and sustains belief in its own "obviousness." Bourdieu underscores the place of the body, its gestures, its stylistics, its unconscious "knowingness" as the site for the reconstitution of a practical sense without which social reality could not be constituted. Bourdieu's notion of the habitus might well be read as a reformulation of Althusser's notion of ideology. Whereas Althusser writes that ideology constitutes the "obviousness" of the subject, but that this obviousness is the effect of a dispositif, the same term reemerges in Bourdieu to describe the way in which a habitus generates certain beliefs. For Bourdieu, dispositions are generative and transposable. Note in Althusser’s "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" the inception of this latter reappropriation: "An individual believes in God, or Duty, or Justice, etc. This belief derives (for everyone, i.e. for all those who live in an ideological representation of ideology, which reduces ideology to ideas endowed by definition with a spiritual existence) from the ideas of the individual concerned, i.e. from him as a subject with a consciousness which contains the ideas of his belief. In this way, i.e. by means of the absolutely ideological conceptual device (dispositif) thus set up (a subject endowed with a consciousness in which he freely forms or freely recognizes ideas in which he believes), the (material) attitude of the subject concerned naturally follows" (p. 167).


CHAPTER 5

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2. Presumably, sexuality must be trained away from things, animals, parts of all the above, and narcissistic attachments of various kinds.

3. The notion of foreclosure has become Lacanian terminology for Freud's notion of Verwerfung. Distinguished from repression under-


9. The following argument is taken from my *Bodies That Matter*, pp. 233–36.


11. This is not to suggest that an exclusionary matrix rigorously distinguishes between how one identifies and how one desires; it is quite possible to have overlapping identification and desire in hetero- sexual or homosexual exchange, or in a bisexual history of sexual practice. Furthermore, “masculinity” and “femininity” do not exhaust the terms for either eroticized identification or desire.


Notes to Phillips Reply


CHAPTER 6


4. Here Freud replaces the term *Sachvorstellungen*, used in his essay “The Unconscious” (*Standard Edition*, 14: 201), by *Dingvorstellung*. In the *Standard Edition*, James Strachey notes that *Dingvorstellung* appears in *The Interpretation of Dreams* in the discussion of jokes. The distinction is that between a word-presentation and a thing-presentation. Strachey explains that the latter consists in “the cathexis, if not of the direct memory-images of the thing, at least of remoter memory-traces derived from these” (ibid.).

5. Freud concedes as much earlier in the essay when he remarks...