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Refusing, and Rejecting the Phallus

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# Women's Bodies of Performative Excess: Miming, Feigning, Refusing, and Rejecting the Phallus

jan jagodzinski

In one of his late essays before his premature death of AIDS related diseases, the art critic Craig Owen observed that a certain calculated duplicity had come to be increasingly regarded as an indispensable tool for deconstruction. Both contemporary art and contemporary theory were rich in parody, the effects of *trompe-l'oeil*, dissimulation, and strategies of mimetic rivalry. The appropriated official discourse—the discourse of the Other—was mimed not to praise or vivify its existence, but to wrestle away its power so that its function as the dominant model was cast into doubt. Mimicking was a form of dis-seizure (and not resemblance), a non-reproductive repetition which repeated rather than re-presented. It belonged to the realm of *simulacra*.

As Deleuze once argued, the *simulacrum* was “an image without resemblance” (49), but then, *not quite*. The *simulacrum* “still produce[d] an effect of resemblance,” but it was a “looking like” that took place in a trick mirror where the spectator lacked mastery. The observer could not dominate the *simulacrum* because it had already incorporated the point of view of the observer. Before the *simulacrum*, the spectator was mastered. Perhaps because of Western culture’s long standing identification of femininity with masquerade, women make “very good mimics,” wrote Barbara Kruger: “We replicate certain words and pictures [and bodies—as will be argued] and watch them stray from or coincide with your notions of fact and fiction” (qtd. in Owens 201). Mimicry, therefore, has been especially valuable as a feminist strategy.

Nowhere has mimicry succeeded so well as in women’s bodybuilding. At first glance, it would appear that women bodybuilders are simply copying men, producing an iconic representation, and therefore desiring to possess the phallic power. Such an impersonation of mimesis, however, takes us away from its more

radical performative possibility. As Aoki and Ian have cleverly shown, it is the bodybuilder who is capable of a disorienting mimetic strategy. In what follows, I juxtapose the theories of Jacques Lacan<sup>1</sup> and Judith Butler (to show how the woman bodybuilder puts into question the public’s commonsense understanding of the sex/gender couplet. I then show how the bodybuilder relates to other postmodern bodies—namely the mannequin (model), anorexic, and bulimic — within a network of discursive circulation which resist the phallic signifier in yet other ways. Finally, I attempt to show how queer bodies, that of the butch/femme, transvestite, cross-dresser and transsexual, further complicate the already troubled heteronormativity.

## I

### Miming the Phallus:

#### The Case of the Female Bodybuilder

#### Muscle as the Bar of Signification<sup>2</sup>

## S

### muscle

## s

When it comes to the female bodybuilder, Aoki has brilliantly analyzed how *Flex* magazine—considered by many to be the quintessential magazine for the serious body builder—presents a particular textual gloss in its “Power & Sizzle” section. Since the early ‘90s the “Power & Sizzle” section has been presenting women bodybuilders in various states of undress. Judiciously advertised on the front cover—as printed in the “X” of the journal’s title (*Flex*)—is a FREE HOT POSTER of the featured bodybuilder which quotes *Playboy*’s infamous centerfold. The textual gloss Aoki refers to concerns the editorial which accompanies every “Power & Sizzle” layout:

Women bodybuilders are many things, among

them symmetrical, strong, sensuous and stunning. When photographed in competition shape, reping and grimacing or squeezing out shots, they appear shredded, vascular and hard, and they can be perceived as threatening. Off season they carry more body fat, presenting themselves in a much more naturally attractive condition. To exhibit this real, natural side of women bodybuilders, *Flex* has been presenting pictorials of female competitors in softer condition. We hope this approach dispels the myth of the female-bodybuilder masculinity and proves what role models they truly are.

The editorial implicates the natural body against a body “drag” which is worn only during competition. Since it is difficult to keep such a body “up,” it falls “off” during non-competitive times when women return to their “natural” state. It seems obvious here that *Flex* is lifting up Perseus’s shield to ward off Medusa’s threat of castration and homophobic fear. A particular segment of women bodybuilders, especially those who seem grotesquely big in relation to the male’s dominant image of femininity, profoundly disturb *Flex*’s placation (see esp. Ian, “Primitive”). Placing these “grotesquely” big bodies in feminine *dessous* is a way for men who produce the magazine to “police” these bodies back into a more acceptable feminine form.

Bev Francis, the star of *Pumping Iron II, The Unprecedented Women*, which documents in 1984 the refusal of male judges to award her first prize because she was just “too” big (i.e., masculine), has now become somewhat of a “legend” in the annals of women’s body building. As Ian (“Drag”; “Primitive”) points out, judging by both male and females since then clearly rests on sex/gender stereotypes rather than muscle alone. The mainstream public who finds female muscularity aesthetically unpleasurable claims that women bodybuilders such as Francis simply “look just like a man,” or are “trying to be a man.” The implication is that such female bodybuilders are lesbians who fit the stereotype of the “butch-femme” or “mannish-lipstick” pairings. These women disturb patriarchy and heterosexism. As Ian (“Drag” 196–197) makes explicit, when it comes to these big bodies both male judges and male bodybuilders tend to be both “femophobic” (afraid of the “feminine”) and homophobic, unable to deal with

women who are “bigger” than they are. To curb their fears they need more “tits and ass,” as Ian bluntly states. It is this image that *Flex* magazine attempts to mitigate. Francis now writes a regular column for *Flex*. Her pose presents, for viewers in the know, the idealized vascularized body where each visible muscle is spectacularized, well-defined and made “presentable.” To achieve this “competitive state” requires the body builder to burn off as much fat as possible by maintaining a strict diet and doing high anaerobic exercise several weeks before the competition, and draining the body of as much water as possible (usually by taking diuretic drugs). Taking steroids to achieve such muscularity haunts every competition. We could call this the “penile pump” as the bodybuilder tries to display as much tumescent muscle as possible; the skin must be well-tanned and oiled, the physique rock-hard, showing striations and bulging veins—in other words to look as much as a giant erection as possible. “Softness,” “wetness,” and slender muscles, characteristic of stereotypical femininity (i.e., the signs of femiphobia) are a liability here. Pose, in Francis’s case, is *not* a sense of position or posture, but of *imposition* and *imposture*. This is precisely the image that *Flex* wishes to guard against by presenting what it considers to be a more feminine presentation, to alleviate any homophobic fears in the heterosexual viewer.

To bring out this the feminine side of bodybuilding, it becomes necessary to drape her body with all sorts of feminine accouterments in order to hide or veil her body from the possibility of a homophobic gaze. Many women bodybuilders in the “Power & Sizzle” section are shown wearing some delicate piece of undergarment or lingerie. However, despite the staging of such a non-threatening pose, *Flex* is unable to efface the masculinity which comes with bulking up and steroid use. The anxiety of the threat is especially evident in the face which begins to disfigure and disturb the feminine presentation—a “Medusa effect” emerges as the facial skin becomes taut, the jaw protrudes, and a “death mask” becomes noticeable. It is often quite easy to misread a woman bodybuilder’s assumed biological sex if only her face is shown. Hers is a “disciplined” body but certainly not disciplined by the look of surveillance as a Foucauldian analysis might suggest (Barky).

### CONTAINMENT STRATEGIES

Flex practices a number of containment strategies on these vascularized big bodies. First and foremost has been to button down the signifier of natural beauty of the female bodybuilder by eroticizing her body, relying on the accouterments of heterosexual fetishism. Besides the usual lingerie, she is often posed nude, or her body is infantilized. Big brawny bodies pose cuddling teddy bears, and quite often positioned on the border of a pornographic discourse. *Muscular Development* has a "Body of the Month" section for instance. *Flex* has gone so far as to produce a swimsuit issue in 1995, a lingerie issue in 1996, and in 1997 a repeat of the lingerie issue called "Lingerie Fantasy." Obviously, the previous special issue must have been enormously successful.

Another strategy of discursive containment has been to position her body in nature with textual "speech-acts" that evoke the *masculine sublime*. Their bodies—like the unpredictable power of Nature itself—can be mastered and tamed. In *Flex* magazine one finds such feature captions as: "Timid No More," "Come Sail With Me," "Mastery," and "A Passion for Muscle." Such key signifiers capture the mastery over her body. A paradigm example is offered by Michelle Andrea who states:

I love being streamlined, muscular and sensual, and out on the ocean. I'm less inhibited and more at one with the world, nature, myself. I'm closer to my primal essence. (Andrea 126)

A further example of the *masculine sublime* at work under the master signifier, "A Passion for Muscle," is offered by Kim Chizevsky, Ms. International, 1993.

Through bodybuilding, I know that I can create a look or change it at will. I can determine how much muscle I want, how cut I want it and how much energy I wish to project. (Chizevsky 127)

One could argue that this masculine sublime refers to what Morse (25) has referred to as the Greek ideal of *kalogagathon*, which connects the beautiful, the good, and the political with social power. Here *kalogagathon*, which normally belongs to the realm of male superiority, is perverted by the sheer drive for muscle—"pure" desire. Muscle on women appears as an achievement.

Strength and power are claimed for their own purposes.

A third containment strategy is to begin to mix the vascularized woman's body with the feminine toned and slender body so as to tame the threat altogether. Seldom, if ever, will a vascularized female appear on the front cover of a muscle magazine. Typically on the front cover of *Muscle & Fitness* magazine or *Muscular Development* there is a "toned" and slender female body, as one might see in *Baywatch*, juxtaposed against a hard vascularized male bodybuilder. The hyperbolic heights of such a containment can be seen on the cover of *Muscle & Fitness* (March 1992) where the toned and slender female has been airbrushed and transfigured into a "Barbie Doll." As Ian articulates, the bodybuilding establishment of Weider Inc. does not promote such bodies. "One did not find the face of the massive Kim Chizevsky, Ms. Olympia from 1996 to 1999, featured on cans of protein powders or on covers of muscle magazines surrounded by doting admirers" ("Primitive" 74).

Yet, after all these strategies of containment "she *still* looks like a man" remains the dominant perception. The imitation of "masculinity" initiates a destabilization of one signifier to another signifier across a succession of signifiers forcing a destabilization of the demarcation between masculinity and femininity to occur. In the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* Lacan wrote:

Whenever we are dealing with imitation, we should be very careful not to think too quickly of the other who is being imitated. To imitate is no doubt to reproduce an image. But at bottom, it is, for the subject, to be inserted in a function whose *exercise* grasps it. (107; added emphasis)

What Lacan is cryptically and punningly saying here is that there is no "original" from which to copy. It is the failure of "exercise" to fully grasp the imitation's referent. In bodybuilding, exercise thwarts the exercise to contain it. Women bodybuilders are not so much parodying male bodybuilders, and thereby sustaining some sympathy with the original which they copy; rather they are enacting a pastiche which *disputes* and puts into question the very possibility of an "original." In the case of sex/gender identifications, their pastiche

reveals that the “original” is already a failed effort by a male bodybuilder to “copy” a fantasmatic ideal that cannot itself be possibly achieved without failure. The irony of this failure is that the woman bodybuilder appears to be *more* masculine than a man given that a “normal” male is generally out of shape and has a lot of body fat or has little muscle development (Aoki ).

The vascularized body of the female bodybuilder, therefore, presents a “both/and” logic which speaks to the “hesitancy” or “undecidability” caused by her looks at the level of the Imaginary psychic order through her mimetic appropriation of masculinity. Masculinity and femininity as binary concepts are deconstructed in Derridean fashion. The female bodybuilder confuses their oppositionality. At the same time the Symbolic register of language, which tries to tie her down in the categories of “woman” and “femininity”, is itself dislocated. These slippages and failures of the Symbolic register of language to hold the feminine Imaginary in place is the result of the bodybuilder’s own *jouissance* (painful pleasure) of performativity, the years of laboring in the gym. Through her own drive (*Trieb*), she achieves the desired state of baroque muscle through an investment in the pain of heavy workouts—often lasting 3–4 hours, sometimes twice a day. This *failure* between the Imaginary and the Symbolic mutually to reinforce one another forces an optical confusion of *failed* meanings by the viewer, thus opening up the abyss of the Lacanian Real. The woman bodybuilder can be read as anamorphic stain skewing the male/female binary. S/he is a stain that troubles perception by unhinging the comfortable frames that are held by the fixed categories of masculine and feminine and the images that these signifiers normally evoke.

Without the “impossibility” of the Lacanian Real there is a danger that her vascularized body becomes merely a rhetorical construction (Dean). This means that not *every* female bodybuilder is able to evoke the uncomfortableness and the uncanniness that is associated with the Real where the spectator becomes “unhinged.” There are many female bodybuilders who do not exhibit the excess of muscle that approach the “impossibility” of a female seemingly “out of place” in the accepted binary.

With such a reading Judith Butler’s theorization of the performative masquerade becomes questionable.

Butler makes the distinction between performance and performativity which reiterates the split between the Imaginary and the Symbolic in Lacanian terms. If the female bodybuilder’s performance (Imaginary) *does not* repeat performativity (Symbolic), then “she looks like a man” can be interpreted as “she looks like a man in drag.” This suggests that the positions of masculinity and femininity have simply been reversed—namely, “she looks like a man who looks like a woman” (Aoki 61). For Laurie Schulze, such a reversal means that the female bodybuilder is “butch,” a body simply caught in a transgression defined by the prevailing binary difference. However, *without* the theoretical possibility of Lacan’s Real (i.e., without the “impossibility” of an unnamed category that is disturbing the accepted binary) such a logic fails to account for the paradox of deconstructing the sex/gender binary by proliferating possibilities. By progressively expanding a category it can mutate in endless difference—a strategy used by Bornstein, for instance, to proliferate transgendered bodies indefinitely so that they begin to defy any easy categorization. The female body builder can begin to look like a transvestite only if the clothes are able sufficiently to camouflage the body to keep the sex/gender confusion in play even when this minimally refers only to her posing briefs and tank top. When this happens the hall of mirrors is once more established as the “failure” of performativity reinserts itself. The female bodybuilder “looks like a woman who fails to look like a man who fails to look like a woman—thus performing a failed impersonation of a failed impersonation” (Aoki 61). The citationality of her performance can lead to infinity, an endless corridor of repetition—the logic of a *mise en abyme*.

What keeps the game of mirroring going is that *sex exists in the Real*. It is beyond the Imaginary and the Symbolic; that is, sex is the failure of *language* as Lacan showed through his “formulae of sexuation” as rearticulated by post-Lacanian like Copjec and Shepherdson. “Gender trouble” is a “*sinthomatic*” condition (Žižek). It is part of our human condition. It will never go away. If Bernice Hausman’s recent book on transsexuality has it right, then gender is only a recent invention of a 1950s discourse emerging from transsexual surgery and endocrinology. More properly, we should be saying that “sex trouble” is always here to



stay. A *signifier* for “sex” does not exist in the unconscious, only the drive towards it exists in the unconscious. Every culture has to invent a myth to bridge the sex/gender divide. Gender is a socially constructed phenomenon involving both the Imaginary and Symbolic registers. Yet, Butler’s position is to claim that *even* sex is socially constructed and not a biological category. The difference between Lacan and Butler is that sex for Lacan is neither biological nor a cultural construct. Rather, it is a phenomenon of bodily drives, of unconscious desire, existing as a linguistic and imaginary *failure*.

The theater of mimed masculinity by the female bodybuilder plays entirely on the secondary characteristics of the body like the wide shoulders and narrow hips that give the exaggerated masculine V-shaped torso, plus the spectacular display of muscle (Aoki 70). In the medical discourse the primary characteristics concerning sex are confined to genitalia. In stark contrast, “sex” belonging in the Real for Lacan is a place of unconscious desire where anatomy is *never* the defining feature. It is possible to be a “man” in a woman’s body, and vice versa, but it is also possible to be a transsexual, like Dil in *The Crying Game* (Woolley) who, as a femaler, desires a man. The vascularized female bodybuilder certainly seems to be unlike a transsexual. There is no claim for altering her genitalia, although steroid use often can bring unwanted hair growth and a deepening of the voice which are, after all, secondary characteristics. The “looks like” in “she looks like” a man distances the imaginary representation from a continuity that is presumed on biological grounds, whereas, in case of some transsexuals, the opposite is true. The distance between the Imaginary and the biological is intentionally closed. The “woman” in a man’s body desires a sex-change operation, quite often on questionable grounds (Millot). So, while the bodybuilder’s masculine secondary characteristics do indeed displace her feminine ones, her feminine characteristics continue to persist as palimpsest traces—the primary site being her shrinking breasts. If things were otherwise the female bodybuilder would be an unproblematic body. Her masculinity would be subsumed by an essential biological femaleness.

In contrast, a transsexual male or femaler bodybuilder would present the mainstream public with

even *more* confusion and anxiety regarding sex/gender. Concerning the case of Bev Francis, judges were afraid that Francis was indeed a transsexual male, but they weren’t about to ask her to drop her drawers. This is not as far-fetched as it first sounds. Ian ( “Primitive 89”) refers to personal trainer Steve Townsley who notes that gyno, testicular, and penile shrinkage could equal the effects of cliteromegaly (clitoral enlargement) and breast shrinkage through hormone use. It is only when “she looks like a woman wearing a man’s body”—when she becomes “just too big” as in Bev Francis’ case—does the uncanny threat appear in the Real, revealing for us the primacy of sex and the secondariness of gender (Shepherdson). By miming the male voice, in effect “stealing” it through steroid overuse, yet another uncanny effect of the Real appears. Her voice seems not belong to her body. It’s just too “deep.” Such a “disembodied” voice becomes quite unnerving. These are precisely the moments when her body becomes abjected by mainstream heterosexual viewers. Her theatricality of masculinity meets Butler’s criterion of performance—it does indeed mime and render hyperbolically the discursive convention that is now reversed—but this is argued by Butler only along Imaginary and Symbolic lines. The Real and *objet a* drop out of her account. *Objet a* in Lacan’s lexicon refers to the unknown “object cause of desire.” As Tim Dean claims, Butler describes a subject of the signifier (a “suave body” as he calls it), *not* a subject of desire which, properly speaking, is not only rhetorically constructed. Desire is something “in” language that is “more” than language itself when identification fails to be made, and that something is the *objet a* cause of desire which belongs to the Real. Ian makes a similar claim in her reference to the exercises that are performed in sets of repetitions (“reps”). “The compulsion to repeat, in excess of any rational reason to repeat, is, according to Freud, an expression of the death drive. Lacanian parlance sometimes refers to drive as ‘that which is in us more than ourselves,’ but it could also be described as ‘that which is in us less than ourselves’ or, perhaps better, ‘that which is in us not ourselves’” (85). Body builders are “driven” to forge muscle.

Bev Francis presented an abjected *objet a* for the judges. Being just “too big,” Francis kept them guessing on the level of the “impossibility” of sexuality it-

self—the order of the Real. What separated her from passing as a transsexual—a living *trompe-l'oeil* effect—was simply her “posing” briefs and tank top that covered her chest-like breasts. They could not ask her to remove them! This presents yet another possible reading of the vascularized female bodybuilder. Lesbian and transsexual bodybuilders can skew dominant heterosexual views of femininity even further. However, I now highlight the radicality of the bodybuilder’s transgression—be she heterosexual, lesbian, or transsexual—by placing her body in relation to the mannequin (model) and the current cultural eating disorders (the anorexic and bulimic), thereby exploring the implications for sex/gender confusions as these other Imaginary bodies labour differently under the masculine phallic signifier heteronormativity. I shall describe the circulation of these bodies utilizing a Greimasian (also see Schleifer) semiotic square (figure 1), where  $S_{1(s)}$  occupies the *logically assertive* position of the female bodybuilder.

## II

### The Eating Disorders: The Anorexic and Bulimic Fat as the Bar of Signification

S  
fat fat fat  
s

The hyperbolic woman bodybuilder not only mimics masculinity but also quotes the *complementary* body of the mannequin—or model—the slender, taut, exercised ideal body of fashion and heterosexual desire.

(The mannequin’s position is  $-S_2$  “the negative complex term” on the Greimasian square, the lower left position.) Although both utilize the space of the gym, the body ideals are quite different, as are their relations to muscle and fat. Whereas the woman bodybuilder uses steroids, hormones, and diuretics to get big and ripped, the model’s regimen, while carefully maintained, is more modest, if not equally restricted. It is less exotic in its make-up than that of the bodybuilder who must withstand the three-to four-hour workout sessions needed to achieve competitive stature. Secondary features for models, especially breasts and face, are given uppermost attention through make-up and plastic surgery such as lip enlargements, breast implants, nose and eye jobs. This is less the case with bodybuilders who, in general, tend to shun cosmetic surgery. It seems to go against the grain of hard sweat and earned physical achievement. Cosmetic technology enhances the body with no effort, yet the *jouissance* that comes with healing is not unlike the pain associated with heavy workouts. For some women bodybuilders breasts shrink away to being little more than hindrances to the full development of the chest muscles. For lesbian butch bodybuilders this can be a desired effect. Although breast implants are done, the rigorous and strenuous exercise makes it more difficult to consider large breast sizes due to the increased possibility of silicon leakage caused by heavy workouts. Big breasts simply can and do get in the way. Pressure for breast augmentation comes from the need to conform to judging based on stereotypical femininity. In serious bodybuilding the breast becomes collapsed and

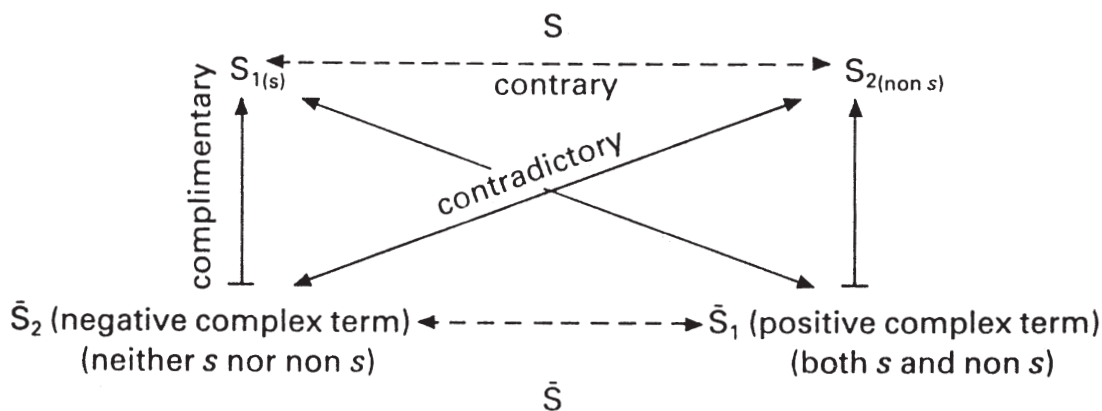


Figure 1

shrunk to signify the male chest—while the maternal belly is written over by the male abdominal washboard. Yet, the gap between the Barbie ideal, as represented by failed starlets like Pamela Anderson, can be closer to the lesbian butch bodybuilder than one thinks if sexual desire is taken into account. Rand tells the stories of some dykes who used the Barbie doll to enact stories about their own sexual desire for a “lipstick lesbian,” or to reject and resist such a body ideal in the first instance. Women bodybuilder wrestlers, for instance, with their breast implants and hyper-exaggerated muscles, also form part of this sliding scale between these two positions.

The degree to which the slender fit body (the “cup-cake” as Ian [“Abject”] calls her), as opposed to muscle bulk or “beef cake,” connotes fragility, defenselessness and lack of power, is dramatically represented in many fashion magazines and, as was pointed out earlier, on the front cover of muscle magazines themselves. The model's preoccupation with fat and diet to achieve a thinner body is to develop a tighter, smoother, and more “contained” body profile, often with black leather, rubber, and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) becoming fashionably a “second skin” as a way to fetishize and infantilize the body. In this sense, fat becomes the bar that wedges itself between the body's inside and outside. Removing it makes one more complete, not to bulk up but to smooth out the curves to achieve being the Imaginary object of male desire. The model-mannequin searches for the slender toned muscular body, exemplified by such contests as Ms. Fitness rather than the muscle bulk of Ms. Olympia. Diet pills, alcohol, and cocaine are the drugs of choice here.

Yet, some feminists such as Hilary Radner argue that even the mannequin (who represents the body of the white middle-class consuming female of privilege who stabilizes and anchors heterosexual “femininity”) is said to present a form of resistance to the masculine phallus! The consumerism of women's fashion magazines, she argues, presents a narcissistic economy of investment that is not, in the first instance, Oedipalized. The narcissistic position of feminine enunciation is not *initially* heterosexual but homosexual. Within the pages of women's magazines, women's narcissism, at least in the first instance, is not inscribed by the masculine gaze (see also Gaines and Herzog). Drawing on

the psychoanalytic theory of Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni, Radner maintains that the auto-eroticism offered through the consumerism of pleasurable images and product usage enables a feminine subject to identify with the initial lost body of her mother. The mother's look transfixes her daughter's subjectivity as an object of identification during the mirror stage.<sup>3</sup> In this pre-Oedipal scenario, Lemoine-Luccioni “inverts” Freud's *fort/da* game where absence and loss institute the phallus as the privileged signifier. He maintains that there is an oscillation during the mirror phase where the mother must guarantee and confirm her daughter's *imago*, or the girl will turn to the father in order to be recognized.

Pushed to the limit, such a position can also include the hyperbolic femininity of such women as country western singer Dolly Parton whose masquerade of self-narcissism could be said to be an over-identification with the image of the lost m(other)—a melancholic hyper-drag which *mimes* femininity itself through exaggeration. Here we have the introjection of the lost (motherly) body as an ego ideal which then enables the ego to treat itself as an object *in excess*. This earlier and originary narcissism captures the loss of the mother that is fulfilled by the consumerism of femininity. While such feminine narcissism is certainly *prior* to the masculine gaze, it can easily be appropriated during Oedipalization. This is one possible explanation as to why model-mannequins have become thinner in postmodern fashion circles compared to the more “full” figures of the modernist 50s like Jayne Mansfield, Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell. The turn away from motherhood by feminists, especially from images of extra-fat and broadening hips that come with multiple child births, has led to a thinner body ideal.

The gap between the female consumer and the desired image, which is impossible to fulfill, is thus read as the impossibility of occupying the mother's position. Nevertheless, pleasure in the self—as a libidinal investment of the self—can take priority. Radner further develops the case of Jane Fonda (the quintessential successful American middle-class white woman) where women's exercise is said to build on this original libidinal narcissism. The fit body as a sign of feminine self-esteem, a mark of self-control and autonomy rather



than submission to the gaze of the masculine subject, takes full flight in the '70s when women entered the work force and the market economy. The "New Woman" (as the autonomous mannequin or power dresser) is thus reinscribed into patriarchy by integrating certain demands by women for economic autonomy. However, the patriarchal system remains intact.

Radner's explication of original narcissism can also lead to what Fuss has called the "homospectatorial look." The fashion industry is the only place where women can look at one another with complete abandon as exemplars of an impossible ideal as well as for homoerotic desire. Women look at women for differing reasons. The child's "rocking in the image" or "tipping over into the image" (Heath 85), oscillating back and forth between the mother and father for a (mis)recognizable *imago* during the mirror stage can go either way. A lesbian choice can take place as well, a position not considered by Radner. As de Lauretis argues, lesbian desire is also the result of castration—but castration as the absence and loss of another woman's body, the mother's or her own, and *not* of the paternal phallus. This loss must also be disavowed and displaced onto some other fetishistic substitute, what de Lauretis names as the "lesbian phallus." For the lesbian bodybuilder this could be any body part. There is also the case that the mother finds her daughter's body *too* phallic, *too* masculine to be desired. If her daughter does not turn to the father, she mourns her own lost female body, and not necessarily her mother's. The above scenarios indicate just how complex sexual desire can become.

### Anorexia

S

bone

s

If the mannequin can be considered the woman bodybuilder's *complementary* body ( $-S_2$ ), the contrary or binary position to the female bodybuilder is, *surprisingly*, the body of the anorexic ( $S_{2(\text{non } s)}$ )—all-body to no-body. Here the bar of signification is reduced to the bone as both muscle and fat begin to disappear and the skeletal frame emerges. Bordo, for instance, argues that bodybuilding and anorexia are both about self-mastery and control. Again the ego ideal of the spectacular mirror comes into play, but unlike the female bodybuilder

who visualizes each and every muscle in it, the anorexic is unable to "see" her body at all. Hers is an ideal image of ascetic slenderness that disappears in the mirror's vanishing point—into Nothingness, into the Real. Here we have the binary of the bulked muscle of the bodybuilder compared to the anorexic's skin and bones. The anorexic is extremely sophisticated in her knowledge of nutrition. Anorexics are inveterate calorie counters where the number count displaces the act of eating itself. Food as material becomes her abject Thing. For the anorexic, fat and muscle have imploded into each other—disappeared. She has no "agency," or rather "agency" as it is normally developed as an ego ideal has "vanished" and then inverted. The only way she is able to push back her parental Ideal ego, which engulfs her, is to starve herself to gain control of her "self" by discarding her "body." In this sense, the anorexic body can be said to present the aesthetics of "disappearing flesh" where the speed of burning fat has reached its impossible limit (Virilio 43; Bray).

The anorexic is, therefore, "literal-minded." The metaphoric becomes concrete, i.e., a substitution of a symbol for what it symbolizes. As with a schizophrenic there is a confusion between the symbol and what it symbolizes, between what is metaphorical and what is "concrete." Her fanatical control over her "body" becomes a synonym for the "self." Her *objet a* is the unobtainable mind without body. (Consequently, Romanyszyn [209] reads the anorexic as the shadow complement of the astronaut's cyborgian body.) Anorexia becomes the cultivation of a specific image as an image—a purely artificial creation. The "will" alone—as a drive—produces it and maintains it against considerable physical odds. The anorexic strives for male values of greater spirituality, higher intellectuality, and strength of will. *It is a turn away from the mother.* Anorexics do not want to grow up as women. They fear the reproductive "female." There is an aversion to breasts and menstruation. In this sense the anorexic and the mannequin easily slip into one another. Many mannequins become anorexic, presenting a contradictory logic on the Greimasian square.

Some anorexics fantasize being a boy. Feminists have interpreted this as a rebellion against a future that will recapitulate the direction of their mothers' lives who are perceived as being submissive to their hus-

bands, controlling of their children, and have given up promising careers for their husbands to be with the family full-time. Some feminists (Bordo; Grosz), therefore, have argued that anorexia is a form of resistance to phallic patriarchy. It should be noted, however, that such resistance should not be over-romanticized, as if anorexia produces a change in the structure of patriarchy itself. Advertising has already begun to appropriate the anorexic in the consumptive logic of capitalism.

The anorexic suffers from a "confusion of pronouns" where no distinction is made between her desires and the perceived wishes of her parents. She often steals the voice of the Other only to mime it (Caskey). This seems to reconfirm her position as the bodybuilder's contrary. It should be qualified, however, that it is usually in hierarchical family configurations where the development of autonomy as intellectual independence is prevented by the mother that anorexia is likely to occur. The father usually has high expectation of academic achievement for the daughter and the life of her mind (Malson). Anorexics have a special relationship with their fathers. In triangulated families she is often allied with him against the mother. Such fathers turn to their daughters in preference to their wives whose maternal qualities they reject.

The anorexic presents the inverse psychic resistance to the phallus of the woman bodybuilder. Rather than the bodybuilder's outright mimicking and feigning the masculine position in the Symbolic register with her sheer musculature and weight, the anorexic gives herself and her body up to the Symbolic Order in order to manipulate the phallus in an extremely autocratic way. By precisely "obeying" what society and her parents appear to be asking of her, the anorexic draws attention to her problem and forces those around her to acknowledge and move in response to her will. By "following" the rules of patriarchy to the "letter" (i.e., be thin, be slender, achieve), she manipulates them. The ecstatic nature of the anorexic *jouissance* is often described as though they had been bewitched: they are unable to control their slide into anorexia once it begins. There is something at once alien and interior to them which takes over at a critical point in the process of losing weight (Malson).

To summarize the semiotic square up to this point: The mannequin thus presents the "*negative complex*

*term*" in the semiotic square ( $-S_2$ ), i.e., she is neither the bulky bodybuilder nor the anorexic. The contradictory relationship she holds with the anorexic ( $S_{2\text{ (non s)}}$ ) seems to be consistent with the confusion of the anorexic mannequin who continues to appear on fashion catwalks as a bodily ideal. The semiotic system of transcendence which both the bodybuilder and the anorexic labor under is *androgyny*. This is the utopian term (S) that effaces any form of sexual difference between them, position outside of the Symbolic Order. It is the attempt to achieve a woman's *jouissance* beyond the phallus. Advertisements of the most recent fashion models have turned to this phantasmatic impossible transcendental image where the androgyne has taken on a "tom-boy" image. The Tommy line of dress wear is perhaps the paradigm case for such an Imaginary, along with Calvin Klein *Obsession* ads in the late '90s where Kate Moss, perhaps the quintessential androgyne-mannequin, received top billing.

The female bodybuilder and anorexic overlap in their aversions to fat (and away from the mother's body which often carries the weight of her children's births) through fanatical exercise and fasting. Both are able to stop their menstrual flows (amenarche). The woman body builder takes the body as being all Self (ego)—as something to be transformed and worn—while the anorexic follows the mind-body dualism (as developed by Plato through to Descartes). The body is something to be discarded so as to Master the Self (ego). The body is not me—not Self. It is a confinement and limitation, and an "enemy." By controlling it she is mastering her spirit—her soul. Her spirit is "in the bone." She "kills off" her bodily desires (*Triebe*) and its hungers by inverting them back into herself, turning inwards to waste away her own "insides." But, of course, the hunger never goes away. The anorexic, in this sense, is the "organic" equivalent to the dream of virtual reality (VR) where the body as "meat" is to be discarded so that only the mind remains in virtual space.

If we now look at the bulimic eating disorder, the bulimic is the "*positive complex term*" in the semiotic square who exhibits the logic of *both* S and non-S ( $-S_1$ ). She is paradoxically *both* the bodybuilder *and* the anorexic in the sense that her identity is shaped by this ambivalence. I have already stated that Androgyny (S) is the point where the female bodybuilder and the

anorexic cancel the sexual differences between the male and female body in the ideal of the androgynous bo(d)y. What then is the -S (non S) where differences cancel themselves out between the mannequin and the bulimic? I suggest that here we find the obese, aged, grotesque, carnival body of the hag which Mary Russo articulates so well after Bakhtin's earlier formulations. Here fat, as the bar to signification, widens out of control. This is the transcendental signifier to be *avoided* (-S). As a negative transcendental signifier, it is shaped by the historical forces that impinge on fertility and reproduction (Trevathan). Letting their "figures" go, both the bulimic and mannequin can slide into the *imago* of being grossly "fat." With such an Imaginary the mother's body comes more into view with its spread of the hips, dragging breasts, but also the aesthetics of Otherness of many non-western agricultural societies where such a body is perceived as beautiful for its capacity to be fertile. Yet, the extremely obese body, as Baudrillard argues, has given up on sex (in any "conventional" way). Like the androgyne, the excessively fat body is amenarchial in its menopausal state.

In "fat porn" the many folds of fat become multiple vulvic orifices for penetration and stimulation. *Jouissance* is achieved by re-locating the body's erotogenic zones which (perhaps?) has something to do with the s(mother) of the mother during the mirror stage through excessive feeding and emotional suffocation. I take the hyperbolic signifier of obesity to allude to the extra fat a mother accumulates after giving birth which in many indigenous societies is not classified as an eating disorder, and historically in matrilineal cultures has been coded as beautiful.

**Bulimia**  
**S**  
**stretched skin**  
**s**

The bulimic is the anorexic's *complementary* and the mannequin's contrary. It can be seen now that the bulimic's oscillation between bingeing and vomiting maintains the social contradiction between desiring to be thin and also desiring a fit slender body which can easily slip into becoming "fat." The range of sizes of dresses she has in her clothes-closet tells the story of the difficulty she has in maintaining such a psychic balance. This ambiguity is presented by "stretched

skin" as the bar which is continually slipping. Fat remains an aversion, but she is pulled to the mother more than the father as an unattainable ideal. In a contradictory relationship with the bodybuilder she shares with the bodybuilder the passion for food and exercise which provides her with the material bulk—the muscles that can never be materialized—as her comfort and security. She exercises vigorously so that she may eat more. While the woman bodybuilder can't keep her body up in a "permanent erection" so to speak, the hysterical bulimic tries to vomit her "other" abjected body out. Like the identity conflict suffered by transvestites, cross-dressers and pre-operational transsexuals, her identity also remains an open question—undecidable. Bulimics are pulled apart between the maternal vulva and the paternal phallus. Their bodies are always journeying hysterically in flux between these two transcendental signifiers which remain at odds with one another. It is no accident that Princess Diana, caught under the constant voyeuristic gaze of the media, found in bulimia a way to cope with her lack of identity as to what was to be her role. Was she to be a mother, celebrity, super nurse, model, self-proclaimed ambassador of Great Britain? Such a mixture of maternal and paternal roles left her uncertain and unsure, living a lifestyle that demanded the paradox of consumption and abstinence at the same time.

To close this section, we can see through a Greimasian square reconfigured below (figure 2) how female bodies circulate in postmodernity. These are semiotically imaginary bodies tied to a discourse that defines them in and against each other. Left at this level, a Foucauldian or Butlerian analysis seems sufficient. But, it should not be forgotten that these "sexed" bodies are also defined by the register of the Real—that psychic space which is beyond both language and the imaginary body as represented by the transcendental signifiers of the impossible "full" positive subjectivity of Androgyny (S) and the avoidance and negativity of Obesity (-S). Not only is their sexual desire impossible to identify in discourse—as the "queering" of this square has already suggested—but also the *jouissance* of the driven body, the very symptom of painful pleasure of transgression that sustains the repetition of their masquerade also belongs to the Real. In this sense, a Lacanian informed analysis addresses the Real of bod-

ily desire, going beyond simply a discursive analysis of the performative body. In the next section the implication of queering the square are more fully explored.

### III

#### Queering the Square 1 Lesbian Butch-femme Positions

##### The Lesbian phallus as the Bar of signification

S

lesbian phallus

s

The lesbian butch bodybuilder and the femme ("lipstick") lesbian can both "pass" in the heterosexual imaginary matrix as previously outlined—either in the male bodybuilding world or on the catwalk. The lesbian butch-femme complementarity *easily* superimposes itself as a *shadow* on the bodybuilding-mannequin complementarity given that the first love-object of primary narcissism and identification during the mirror stage is the Mother in both cases. The ensuing masquerade between them *can* remain indistinguishable (at least for the heterosexual gaze; see Tyler). As Elin Diamond points out in "Mimesis, Mimicry, and the 'True-Real,'" Luce Irigaray's third section of *Speculum of the Other Woman* identifies "two mimetic systems that exist simultaneously, one repressed by the other" (64). The first she calls "patriar-

chal mimesis" which merely copies the dominant and is not repressed, while the second, which she calls "mimesis-mimicry," is the excessive production of the first structure of mimesis, spilling into mimicry and multiplicity. Queer desire informs this second position while heterosexual desire circulates in the first system.

The mannish face and body of the female bodybuilder which otherwise causes homophobic terror/and or repulsion in the straight male, is considered erotic and attractive by lesbian standards. It now becomes possible to pick up an earlier issue which was left unresolved: namely, the "homospectatorial look" of fashion and lesbian desire that emerges from the loss of another woman's body during the mirror stage—either as her own body because of her Mother's incapacity to desire it, or the Mother's body itself. The mourning which follows the loss of the female body is then replaced by a "*fetish*" which is a displacement of the bodily disposition that constitutes the castration the girl suffers" (Grosz 165; emphasis added). As de Lauretis maintains, the "lesbian *fetish* is any object, any sign whatsoever, that marks the difference and the desire between the lovers" (236; emphasis added). This includes the whole of the woman's body, or something metonymically related to it. According to de Lauretis, the mannish lesbian's body "cannot be narcissistically invested because it is phallic" (241). She suffers a narcissistic wound during the mirror stage since her bodily

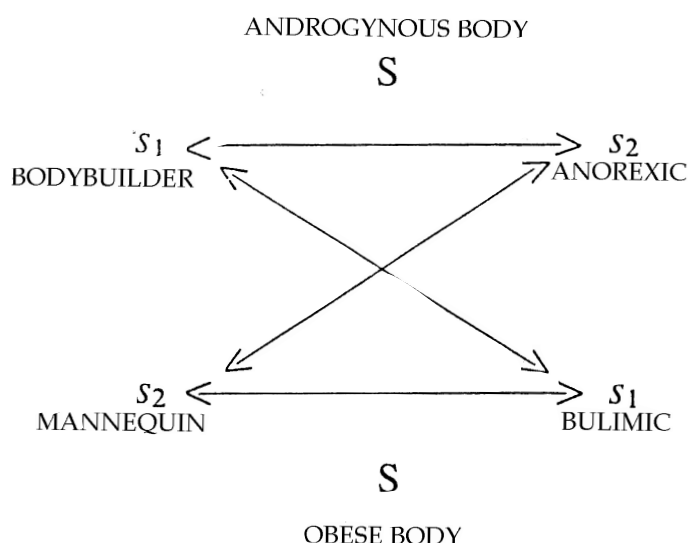


Figure 2

*imago* is *not* confirmed as feminine by “the other person” (usually her mother), and because what she sees in the mirror is a phallic body image that cannot be loved. De Lauretis concludes from this that the loss of the female body, this narcissistic wound, is disavowed by the fetish of mannish clothing and the mannish body which are the “signs of both an absence and a presence, as the denied and wished-for female body” (241).

Given that modern Western cultures heavily dichotomize gender and anatomical differences where masculinity is associated with sexual activity and desire, de Lauretis maintains that the fetish of masculinity is what “both lures and signifies her desire for the female body” (243). For the femme lesbian, who over-identifies with the loss of the mother’s body, fetishistic displacements (as *objet a*) take on the signs of femininity, which can be hyperbolic and parodic in their forms. This can also mean desiring the maternally obese body which is also unloved and abjected in current patriarchy. Hence big-hips, wide-buttocks, large breasts, and a large body become desirable fetishes in some relationships. In butch-femme relations, however, these fetishistic displacements are *not for the paternal phallus*, but for a “fantasy-phallus” (de Lauretis 225) or “the lesbian Phallus” (Butler, “Phallus” 158). The fetish is the signifier of perverse desire which, in contradistinction to the paternal phallus-penis, serves as the sign or signifier of prohibition, difference and desire.

If we return to the semiotic square (figure 3) and now begin to queer its left complementary side, we find that the transcendental point where the butch/femme complementarity disappears into the abyss of the Real is subsumed under the “lesbian phallus” (hence designated as  $\S$ ) or “fantasy phallus” ( $\S$ ). It is at this impossible point where an infinite number of potential signs, traits, gestures, mannerisms pose the fetishistic lure that Lacan attributed to *objet petit a* as the “cause” of desire. The “lesbian phallus” exists in the Lacanian Real. Attempting to occupy it presents the impossibility of ~~The~~ Lesbian which, as Fuss (“Essentially”) claims, is the very danger of Monique Wittig’s otherwise exemplary work.

We can now more readily understand why the butch lesbian bodybuilder’s seemingly mimed phallic body, as the unloved body of the heterosexual male gaze, cannot be equated to the masculine phallus. However, it seems to me that the penis-phallus slippage that occurs in Lacanian theory occurs equally in lesbian desire where the lesbian dildo and the “fantasy phallus” are said to exist in two different psychic registers. “The lesbian-dick is the phallus as floating signifier that has no ground on which to rest. It neither returns to the male-body, originates from it, nor refers to it. Lesbian-dicks are the ultimate simulacra. They occupy the ontological status of the model, appropriate the privilege, and refuse to acknowledge an origin out-

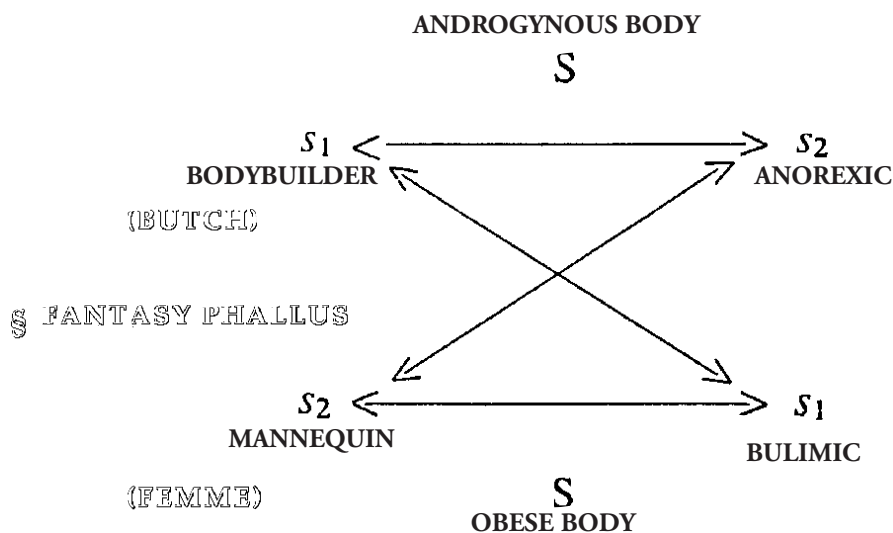


Figure 3



side their own self-reflexivity" (Hart 58). So stated, however, the slide between lesbian phallus (as dildo) into the masculine phallus cannot be easily stopped. The pumped phallicized body of the woman bodybuilder and the dildoad femme who straps on the "Real Thing" are perhaps able to prevent this slippage in the privacy of their s/m rituals where, in the lesbian imaginary, it is the "bottom" who *is* the "lesbian phallus" (as *objet a*) in the form of her fetishized body, while the "top" *has* it.

Public display, however, often tells a different story. For Lacan, the phallus was fraudulent. It had to remain veiled for its power could always be exposed as lacking. Consequently, much less of a threat to the heterosexual male than the woman bodybuilder is female transvestitism, i.e., cross-dressing where "looking like a man" is more easily contained by "she looks like a man in drag." Although wide padded shoulder jackets, a fashion statement in the mid-'80s, did exaggerate the female torso so that she looked "masculine," there was no Real of sexuality to pose a threat. More often than not, her mimicry was more a mimesis of the masculine sign system where male clothing such as business suits, white shirts, ties, jeans, and underwear (like boxer shorts) were freely borrowed. There were no sliding signifiers here. Yet, she remained a woman even *more* desirable despite the male drag for it gave the sartorial style the appearance of a spurious equality between the sexes in a pretense to androgyny by metonymically appropriating male signs while her body remained a palimpsest. In contrast the mannish lesbian required more than clothes to become desirable. She had to have physical, intellectual, and emotional attributes as well.

The question of the mannish transvestite being less of a threat to the heterosexual male than the mannish female bodybuilder occurs due to this slippage between the "lesbian phallus" and the "masculine phallus." Hollywood fares very badly here since it takes more than clothes and a deep voice to get it "right." Lesbian representation in mainstream films is generally abysmal because of the slippages which occur most often between mannish drag and the heterosexual woman in male drag. Most often it is her "femme" counterpart whose representation is less threatening to the heterosexual gaze which receives exposure.

Madonna's claimed bi-sexuality is another such failed example. Her well-known allusions to the "mannish Lesbian scene" in Paris in the 1920s—the tuxedo, the cigarette, the cropped haircut, and the monocle—seems to exhibit such a failure. The monocle, in particular, points to the slippage between the Lesbian Phallus with the heterosexual One. The monocle is "[s]imultaneously a signifier of castration (detachable, artificial, made to be put on and taken off) and of empowerment; the monocle, when worn by a *woman* emphasizes, indeed parodies, the contingent nature of the power conferred by this instrumental 'affection'" (Garber 154; added emphasis). Worn by Madonna, however, the monocle floats back to being metonymically male. If the threat of mannish transvestitism were as great as the castration threat aroused by the female bodybuilder, why would a life-style magazine like *Vanity Fair* (November 1998) place Cindy Crawford, the quintessential mannequin, along with k.d. lang the quintessential mannish lesbian in the fantasy scene of the mirror of a barbershop cum coiffure environment? Crawford, face covered with shaving cream, sits in the barber chair waiting to be shaved by k.d. lang, who holds a razor in her hand. The implied castration threat raises the tension between these bodies.

If a transvestite is able to play with gender identity through the masquerade of clothing, demonstrating the symbolic character of identity through a mimetic adoption of behavior, while a transsexual assumes an even more radical position of altering the body itself, trying to change the very material of flesh as if the body were just another constructed phenomenon of manipulation, then the vascularized female bodybuilder *seems to occupy a space of their joining*. She is neither one nor the other, but keeps her viewers perpetually guessing on which side of the divide she belongs; walking along the bar of castration between the heterosexual and homosexual divide. She is a stain in ~~The~~ Symbolic Order—offering viewers an anamorphic gaze of the binary itself by deconstructing the very distinction between the transvestite and the transsexual, creating yet another "unnamable" and "unrepresentable" space—a Thing in the Real (Lacan, "Ethics") which, rather than veiling our lack, confounds desire when the mainstream heterosexual gaze fails to identify with her, and then abjects her body. In such a reading

the logics of the semiotic square plunge us into hyper-complex slippages of meaning (figure 4).

#### IV

#### Queering the Square 2:

#### Cross-dressers, Transvestites, and Transsexuals

#### The Bar of Undecidable Signification

#### S

#### undecidability

#### s

Lastly, if we move to the right hand side of our square, it can be queered yet again by introducing the cross-dressing of men as women (including pre-operational transsexuals only on hormones), and the transsexuality operated femalers. They shadow the anorexic-bulimic complementarity *not* because they are able to “pass” in the same way as butch-femme lesbians, rather because they also suffer a crisis of identity in heteronormative patriarchy just like the other two eating disorders. Male cross-dressers, (pre-operational) and transsexuals desire either to “pass” into ~~The~~ dominant Symbolic Order (but are unable); or others, like Kate Bornstein, want to form a coalition of the “transgressively gendered” to challenge the established heteronormativity. This *could* include not only pre-operative and post-operative transsexuals, but also transvestites, drag queens, cross-dressers, bisexuals, gays and lesbians, and even straights who exhibit transgressed gender roles.

It is at this point that the issues and politics which surround “transgenderism” (Ekins and King) become complex and contestory. During the ’90s a transgendered community emerged which pulled itself away from gay and lesbian enclaves that once gave them shelter (repeating an earlier split of radical lesbians from the dominant feminist movement), thus raising a new set of theoretical differences progressively termed *queer theory* (Whittle). No longer satisfied with being pejoratively called the “third sex,” those who choose partial technological sex changes, and those who cross-live without the mediation of medical intervention have attempted to form communities and enclaves of their own (Perkins; Buhrichi). As gendered “outlaws,” they attempt to disrupt the hetero/homo binary by way of a “gender fuck.”

Lesbian feminists like Janice Raymond, however, claim that transgendered males are involved in sexual exploitation and prostitution. “The Chick with a Dick” who exudes hyperfeminine and hypersexual traits, or who attempts to become the image of a perfect mannequin, is simply conforming to conventional sex-roles by taking hormones and having surgery in order to attract other men. Raymond is particularly adamant about cross-dressers, drag queens, and heterosexual transvestites who clandestinely parade around in ultra-feminine dress while still retaining their public personae as straight, white, male conservative pillars in their community. It is such mimicry that can bring stardom in a cabaret. Showalter disparagingly called

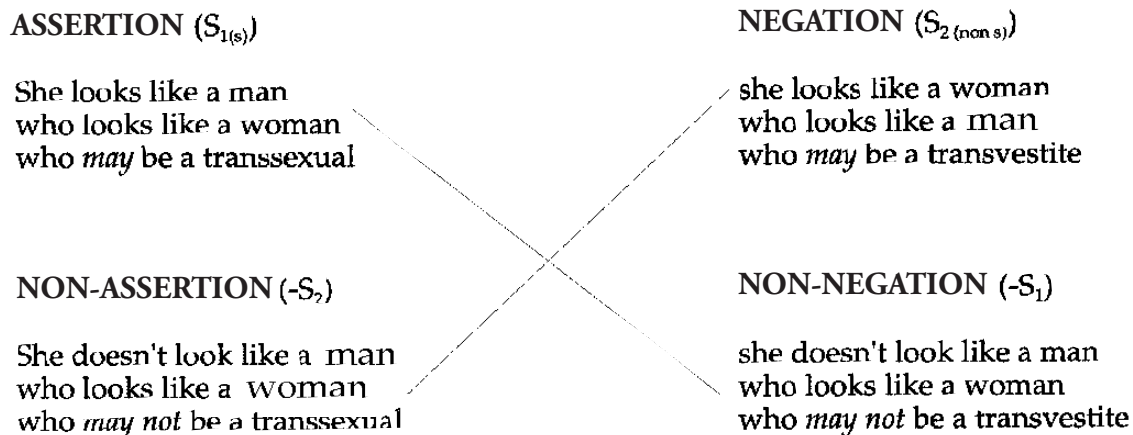


Figure 4

this "The Tootsie Syndrome" after Dustin Hoffman's performance in the film *Tootsie*. The man donned a better drag of woman than any woman could possibly achieve, like Australia's Barry Humphries as Dame Edna. Such mimicry does nothing to change or challenge heterosexuality as much as providing an ironic and sometimes satirical statement that confirms its structural existence. It may be inversely compared to those women stealing male signifiers for their own pleasure (e.g., the wide shoulder pads of the power executive woman in the '80s).

From this we can see the emergence of the complex or utopian term (-§) where the opposition of identity can be transcended (figure 5). We have here the identification of the shadow opposite of the Lesbian Phallus, namely the attempt by some transsexuals and cross-dressers to become ~~The~~ Woman (-§). Shepherdson evokes the clinical work of the Lacanian psychoanalyst Catherine Millot on transsexuality to demonstrate the ethical concerns the medical profession overlooks when it avoids the question of constitutive subjectivity of transsexuals, and disregards the distinction between a patient's *demand* and *desire*. The medical profession acts as an omnipotent Other where

there is no limit placed as to what surgery is capable of doing. When questions are avoided when *listening* to what is behind the patient's *demand*, the institution acts as if it were "outside the law," a position of omnipotent *jouissance*. They become "medical perverts" in this regard for they complete the demand of the patient without seeking to know "his" or "her" desire, which is precisely what the patient's demand seeks to evade. In this sense, the demand the patient seems to make "freely" and without coercion, in fact, comes from the medical profession itself. They alleviate the patient's anxieties.

A percentage of transsexuals *do not* identify with "the other sex" as lacking; i.e., as entailing the ambiguity and uncertainty that such an operation will bring. Rather, they are *horsexe*, "outside" this distinction, nearly psychotic, believing that the "other sex" is *not lacking*. Such a phallic identification eliminates sexual difference as lack. In their fantasy of "otherness," sex/gender trouble will disappear once symbolic ambiguity—as the failure of the signifier that accompanies difference—is eliminated through an operation. The perfected body is fantasized as being outside of historical ex-istence in which it currently suffers. Their iden-

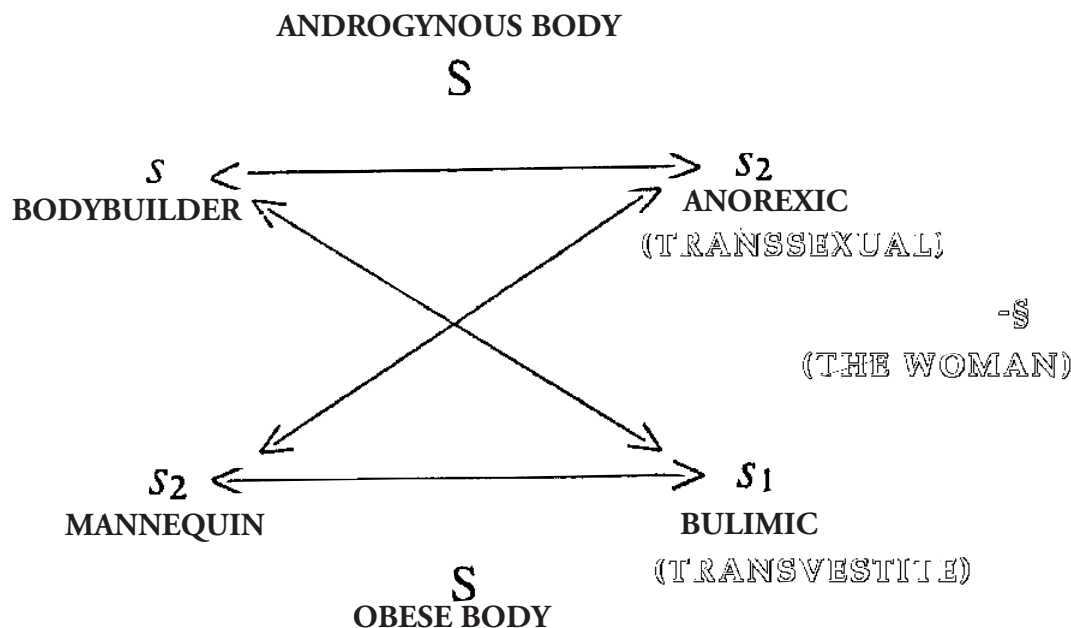


Figure 5

tification with “outside sex,” with “*La Femme*” (*The Woman*) or *The Father* becomes a narcissistic image wherein the phallus becomes “‘incarnated” (Shepherdson 177). For the *horsexe* male transsexual, identification with “*La Femme*” forecloses the position of “a woman,” since now what it means to be a “woman” has been totalized as *The Woman*..

In contradistinction, those transsexuals who desire an operation are—properly speaking—men trapped in women’s bodies (as a female maler), or women “born” in men’s bodies wanting to be get rid of it, to become a male femaler. The transsexual has not yet *constituted* a “body” that can be mobilized in relation to society in order for “him or her” to act as a subject (Rees; Ekins). Such a position is radically different from bi-sexualism where the oscillation between the heterosexual and gay and lesbian divide can take place by “passing” in either camp (see Garber). Transgenders are not *necessarily* bi-sexual; however, as “outlaws” to the hetero/homo divide they necessarily must struggle for a sense of identity.

However one looks at transgendered transsexuals, their *drive is a demand* for the desired gendered subjectivity and the pleasure of its enactment. Consequently, like bulimics, male femalers who are pre-operational, or who cross-dress, try to resolve their identity conflict by oscillating between male/female subject positions—a gender confusion which cries for resolution. The temporary resolutions are found in miming signifiers of the sex they wish to become by projecting an alter-ego, dressing like women, wearing the feminine masquerade, and performing a feminine comportment. John Money names this “transvestophilia,” the “fetishistic dependence on cross dressing for erotic arousal” and “gynemimesis,” which is a permanent shift to living like a woman while continuing to have male genitals (94) .

Bernice Hausman, working within a Foucauldian paradigm, brings an interesting perspective into these theoretical difficulties by convincingly pointing out that “gender” as a discursive term was the result of plastic surgery (sex-change operations) and edocrinological research by John Money in 1955. Gender, as a concept, prior to that time did not exist; rather, sex roles and sex orientation were the assigned words for sexual difference. A gender terminology emerged to deal with

the emerging research on intersexuality. Here, yet another form of mimicry emerges. The manufacture of female genitalia that fool the eye of even expert gynecologists, and a technology and endocrinology which can produce simulated genital and secondary organs that appear authentic, raise the question of the nature/culture binary. Such bodily *trompe l’oeil* effects operate at a first-order level of signification based on a two-sexed system which again appears “natural.”

The transsexual body can be constructed by inverting the primary characteristics of the sexed body itself, e.g., through breast implants, surgically inserted female genitalia, and phalloplasty (less successful) along with hormonal treatments. This constitutes a first order deconstruction of the “real” by introducing an impossible ideal; i.e., the possibility of becoming (simulating) the sex one is not as the “Real Thing” (as *The Woman*). At the second order of signification, a “core gender identity” based on the way a transsexual feels—his or her gendered behaviors—present a discordant picture to this already deconstructed “natural” base. The idea of gendered identity overrides the “natural” sexed body making this a “self-erasing system” which disrupts acceptable normative sexual differences. A “core gendered identity” sets in motion the surgical change to the “natural” sexed body by the knife and hormonal treatments to meet this imagined gendered image. These two discordant orders of signification, which now appear to act homologously as the inside (identity) and the outside (body), are like the metaphor of the Möbius strip in Lacan’s system: an Imaginary sexed body and a Symbolic gendered identity, both of which are outstripped by the Real. In the Real, transsexuals continue to fantasize the “Real Thing” (for at least six months to qualify for surgery). Sex in this case, is a *simulacrum*. In the Lacanian sense, it “does not exist.”

As can be gleaned from the above discussion, transsexual and transvestite bodily performances are difficult to sort out easily. They shadow the same gendered identity confusions that inform the anorexic/bulimic subjectivities. We therefore, end this discussion of postmodern sex/gendered bodies with a complete diagram of the semiological square—fully queered (figure 6). It should be re-stated that those cultural critics who have found Greimas’s work useful take full note

that it is a dynamic and changing set of relationships, not rhizomatic, but certainly hyper-complex. The failure of identity happens continually since “no body/nobody” can occupy completely the transcendental signifier of Androgyny, the Obese Grotesque Body, the Lesbian Phallus, nor the ~~The~~ Woman. I have suggested that the big vascularized body of the body builder in the assertive position in the Square acts like a “strange attractor” when it comes to the complexities that surround the vectors of desire that are in motion. This hyper-complexity can be intensified further should male bodies in difference be theorized and superimposed, or rather underexposed on it.

If a third spatial dimension could be added to the queered square we could say that the technological cyborgian body trajectory is towards technologies of reproduction which are represented by the upper part of the semiotic square (Davis-Floyd and Dumit). The trajectory the other way (down) is towards the organic mutant body (Garland). These trajectories repeat the hypercomplexities of the mind/body dualism. Both have generated their dystopian fears of horror and the uncanny during this postmodern uncertainty where it may be said that the sublime has become the dominant aesthetic as the late Lyotard had argued. In the end, these performative bodies of excess cannot be categorized, labeled and given their “proper place” on some

manageable grid. Rather they continually escape the very signifiers that try to pin them down as they labor in their own “impossibility.”

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Lacan develops three registers throughout his writings which will be put to use here. The Symbolic Order identifies the level of the signifier, language as such; the Imaginary psychic register generally refers to the level of imagery that supports the signification of language. Roughly speaking, the Imaginary psychic register has to do with body imagery and perception. Lastly, the Real psychic order is beyond both the Symbolic and Imaginary psychic registers. It is a realm of the psyche which is unknown and uncanny. We can refer to it as an affective state of the body where no words or images adequately grasp meaning. The Real is a state of non-sense. It is the state of the body's drives (*Trieb*) as well as its *jouissance* which refers to the painful-pleasure associated with one's symptom as the psychic state of the Real, e.g., trauma, and the recurrence of a symptom. All three psychic realms are interrelated and cannot be separated. In her writings Judith Butler accepts Lacan's Symbolic and Imaginary psychic registers, but rejects the Real.

<sup>2</sup>This newly created sign for the woman bodybuilder quotes Lacan's famous *inversion* of de Saussure's notation of the sign where the signifier (S) is “barred” (i.e., made autonomous) in relation to the signified (s). I am suggesting here that it is “muscle” which forces the slippage between the culturally established correlation between the signifier and the signified of what is a masculine and what is a feminine body.

<sup>3</sup>The “mirror stage” as defined by Lacan is a process that occurs between 6 and 18 months of age when the child begins to misrecognize his/herself in a (metaphorical) mirror as the ego is

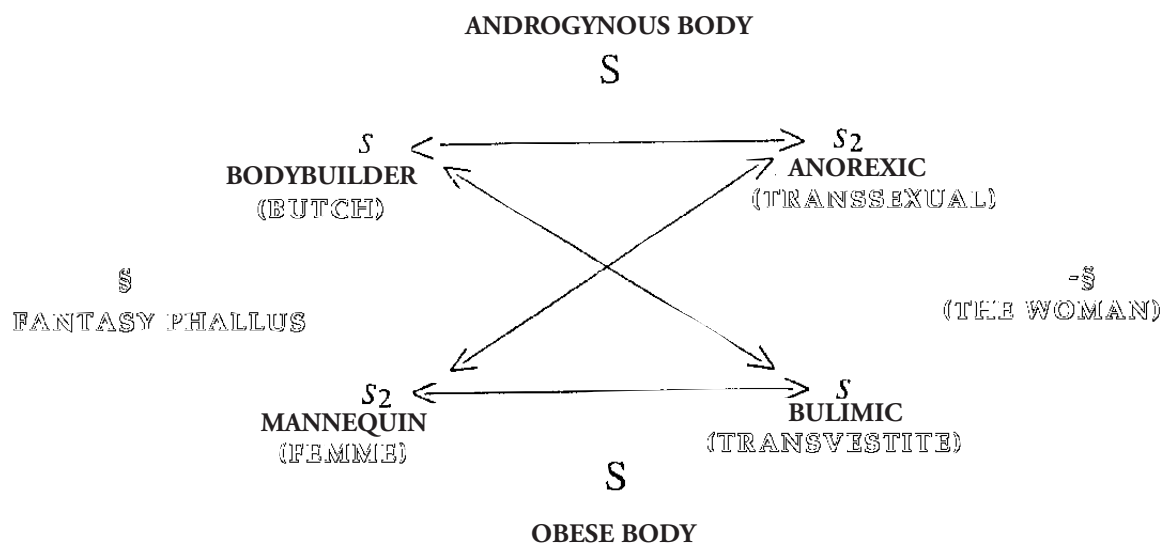


Figure 6



formed. It is a misrecognition because the gestalt formed is a spectacular (imaginary) ego ideal which outstrips the physical body's capacity for coordinated movement.

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