

DISPLACING PHALLOGOCENTRISM:
FRAGMENTED SUBJECTS & TRANSGENDERED BODIES

By
Tara Knight, BA

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Approved:

Dr. Chris Coffman, Committee Chair
Dr. Rich Carr, Committee Member
Dr. Sarah Stanley, Committee Member
Dr. Alexander Hirsch, Committee Member
Dr. Rich Carr, Chair
Department of English
Mr. Todd Sherman, Dean
College of Liberal Arts
Dr. Michael Castellini
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract

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synthesizes theories about gender construction and identity formation as proposed by Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan, and proposes that the cultural sediment created by heteronormativity and phallogocentrism can be displaced by the proliferative re-conceptualization and re-signification of transgendered subjects. Because the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, Simone de Beauvoir's theory about the inner identity's desire for transcendence and Judith Butler's theory about the materiality of the signifier demonstrate how subjects are 1.) always already transgendered, and 2.) constantly reshaping the material world through re-signification.

Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* dramatizes the act of displacing phallogocentrism by allegorizing the notion through the corporations and Puritans that her fragmented female protagonist, the chemist/Dog-Woman, is fighting against. Because heteronormativity and phallogocentrism can only be displaced by the fragmented and transgendered subject, Winterson shows how it is only after her male protagonist, Nicolas/Jordan, has grafted a feminine identity onto himself and become a transgendered subject when he can finally be free from the shackles of phallogocentrism and re-signify the future.

Because phallogocentrism compels subjects to reiterate socially-constructed sedimentations that unevenly distribute power to some subjects while disenfranchising others, this thesis highlights the imperative need to displace the sedimentation of phallogocentrism in order to transgender the body and re-conceptualize the world.

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Preface

Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity...Nor will *you* have escaped worrying over this problem – those of you who are men; to those of you who are women this will not apply – you are yourselves the problem. – Sigmund Freud “Femininity”

...she is a slave to the species... – Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex*

From the time that Sigmund Freud and his fellow people were banging their heads against that unrelenting “riddle” of femininity to the present day in which women’s bodies are still under scrutiny and legislation, the discussion about gender, and more specifically about femininity, continues to be a topic of contention.¹ While a plurality of genders and identities have in large part taken shape and come into the public consciousness – which is *somewhat* beginning to displace the previous heteronormative notions of gender – the feminine body has perpetuated in a place that is outside of law, language, and linear time, and the existence of non-normative genders continues to be overlooked by the hegemonic discourse. The discussion that has taken place since Freud first theorized his normative model of libidinal development, most notably taken up by psychoanalysts, feminists, gender theorists, structuralists, post-structuralists, and masculinists, has not evolved into something new for the human body. Rather, over the years, femininity – and more generally, *the gender dichotomy* – has been limited to the same dichotomies and reductions that had originally formed it. Undeniably, women have succeeded in acquiring certain rights for themselves and subsequent generations – rights that have been expanded upon intellectually and practically. However, these social productions should not be viewed as having amended the way in which the social consciousness (and for that matter the

¹ Sigmund Freud, “Femininity,” *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 1965), 140.

social unconsciousness) views and treats femininity, masculinity, gender, or power relations, as social expectations are still inscribed on, and continue to prescribe, the human body.

When I began this project, my idea was to propose a theory about “active femininity.” To some, this seemed like a fascinating proposal and a long-awaited enterprise to supplant the seeming void in the fields of psychoanalysis and gender studies; however, to those well-versed in these fields, my proposal probably came across as inchoate and a bit trite. To most people – and, specifically, to those individuals *less* fluent in these fields – this project seemed confusing and pointless. After all, hasn’t feminism, but more specifically, women’s rights movements, solved the problem of women’s equality and rights? (To which I would respond: If we need the perpetual qualifier of “women’s” to stand before “equality and rights,” then no, it hasn’t.) Aren’t Western women – with some exceptions – enjoying the same freedoms as men? (With some exceptions.) Why “active” femininity – or how, when, and where is femininity *not* active? I understood their confusion here. After all, I’m a female hockey player. Did that make my activity masculine by default, or was it possible for my activity to be considered feminine? Had I simply been mis-performing my gender since childhood? What purpose does gender-coding activity and passivity serve, where exactly did the prescription of masculinity as active and femininity as passive originate, and what compels this dichotomy to continue? These challenges forced me to question whether there was a point to my endeavor, and whether I would have anything new to argue. Perhaps most importantly, these oppositions compelled me to inquire what was really at stake, if anything.

As often happens, my theory transformed as I performed more research and as I continued to encounter these rather surface-level interrogations (to which I offered my surface-level retorts). Why does it matter that femininity has been deemed to a *passive existence*? When I addressed this question, I realized why I was so consumed by the riddle of femininity that Freud had lectured about – largely to and for a masculine audience – nearly a century ago: the passivity *prescribed* to femininity has caused *femininity to be continually reiterated and reconstructed as passive*.² In other words, by theorizing femininity as passive, passivity has been forced onto women through out history, which has made women an easy target for sexual, domestic, physical, ideological, and legislative violence. Yet, if femininity is always reconstructed as passive, while masculinity is continuously reiterated and reconstructed as *active*, then where do the other genders fall on this active-passive, subject-object continuum? Many theorists building on the foundations of psychoanalysis, linguistics, and post-structuralism claim that these other genders, identities, or beings exist outside of that continuum as the object. The object is that which propels subjects to become signified and enter into the heterosexual matrix in order to avoid becoming what is socially and intelligibly naught.

However, how can something exist physically – as we are starting to see with the burgeoning plethora of identities, genders, and sexualities – but not exist conceptually, as the qualifier “object” suggests? If we are to accept Julia Kristeva’s definition of the object as the breaking down of boundaries and as the confrontation of the subject with the subject’s own

² In “Femininity,” Freud claims that it is false to see femininity as passive, as there are many active processes that the female body undergoes, i.e., having a baby, breastfeeding, etc. However, Freud claims that femininity is symbolically passive because the activity exhibited by young girls does not translate into intellectual or political activity later in life. Hence, Freud proposes that the *female body* is the site of very active, but strictly biological, processes.

corporeal reality, then the abject necessarily resists conceptualization and symbolization due to its indefinable proliferation and its resistance to categorization. Within the Lacanian symbolic order, the abject can only be peripherally understood as that which is linguistically and socially unintelligible. Ostensibly, this would mean that those “abject beings” exist outside of the continuum of social intelligibility. They exist as the “baseness” that compels individuals to enter into a privileged existence of heteronormativity in order to become signifiable and signifying subjects. Arguably, then, to “be” abject is to not exist. This realization made me wonder whether there was a connection between the non-existence of the abject and what Jacques Lacan deemed the “not-all” of femininity. It was clear that femininity was not the only gender in jeopardy.

With gender still clearly in trouble, is it even possible to reclaim gender from the sedimentation of heteronormative and phallogocentric norms in order to offer a reinterpretation that promotes inclusivity and multiplicity while eschewing prescription? Although the task may not be impossible, heteronormativity and phallogocentrism regularly reduce “gender” to “sex,” objectify the feminine position in the service of sexualization, and negate the existence of non-normative genders. If we cannot satisfactorily accept the constructivists’ theories, as Judith Butler avidly illustrates in *Gender Trouble* that “sex, by definition, [has] been gender all along,” and, as we certainly cannot accept the essentialists’ biology-is-destiny approach, then where are we left to turn?³ Feminism, in its many forms, has appeared to be just as problematic, as “the category of ‘women,’ the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures

³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), 11.

of power through which emancipation is sought.”⁴ In more recent years, a number of materialist philosophies have become popular in this discussion for the equal attention they pay to epistemology and ontology, as they theorize – in varying degrees – that what constructs human thought and the meaning that is assigned to it is spurred by the lived experience of collective groups and the material reality of the world.

However, the various versions of materialism seem to offer a limited platform when trying to conceptualize gender in a more inclusive way. Indeed, the emphasis these theories place on the ways in which epistemology stems from ontology appears to be at odds with de Beauvoir’s notion of transcendentalism and seems to challenge Butler’s notion of performativity, as a materialist philosophy would ostensibly be demarcated by a state of pure physicality, which would leave little room for transcendence or performance. In fact, at first glance, the constraints imposed on materialist philosophies seem to align with those very constraints essentialist theories impose on the body, as, due to the emphasis that materialist philosophies place on the idea that thought originates from matter, it would make sense to assume that materialist theories promote a biology-is-destiny philosophy.

Yet, in her book *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler makes the argument that what is material is not limited to the physical world and contends that the signifier itself is a materiality.

⁴ Ibid, 4.

Note: While women must be the primary subject of feminism, because feminists seek political gain in a masculinist signifying economy, feminism itself is formed within an economy that has established and continues to establish its exclusion. By delimiting its content to that of women and femininity, some critics claim that feminism excludes itself and reinforces inequality. Moreover, some claim that by ostracizing itself as a self-interested pseudo-hegemon, feminism’s influence is incapable of extending beyond its own reach.

In this sense, Butler seems to align her theories with the more evolutive philosophy of dialectical materialism by suggesting that the imaginary space of the psyche is both a material thing and also creates materiality. If, to paraphrase Butler, sex *has* been gender all along, then it would be safe to assume that our concept of gender has been constructed around the notion of sex all along. If this is the case, then the line between what was formerly understood to be material or natural and what was understood to be constructed or interpreted appears to fade. If what we understand to be natural is always already a human construct, then is it possible for gender and sex to finally be divorced within the social psyche, or are they the forever compelling force, impelled by the phallic signifier and propagated within the more real and bodily yonic⁵ prison?

Although Butler's use of dialectical materialism returns to the notion of constructivism, it underscores an evolutive process that appears to be an innate component to the nature of human existence: the interpretability of the world. Her emphasis on the changeability of matter and language implies that in spite of the regulatory powers and ideological structures that have permeated the subject, the human subject nevertheless possesses those very same powers that allow it to reconstruct materiality, language, social concepts, and perhaps, itself. In a world that has already been constructed, how might the agency of the subject be thought in order to be added back into the equation? Moreover, how might a new formula illustrate the ways in which subjects are capable of displacing phallogocentrism? In the text that follows, I will explore these questions and suggest that Simone de Beauvoir's theory about the subject's desire for

⁵ "A figure or symbol of the female organ of generation as an object of veneration among the Hindus and others."

OED Online. December 2016. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/232114?redirectedFrom=yonic> (accessed December 31, 2016).

transcendence and Judith Butler's theory about the materiality of the signifier indicate that subjects are capable of displacing the sedimentation of phallogocentrism through the proliferative reinterpretation and re-conceptualization of their differentiated perceptions.

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After writing a thesis that is, in its essence, about the social construction of knowledge, I feel it is necessary to recognize those individuals who have helped inspire, challenge, and shape this work. It would be false to claim sole ownership to the ideas presented in this thesis, as the text that follows is a product of cumulative ideas, shared insight, and constructive feedback. The materialization of *Displacing Phallogocentrism: Fragmented Subjects & Transgendered Bodies* would not have been possible without the patience, generosity, time, and support offered to me by my mentors, colleagues, friends, and family.

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involvement in my athletic life inspired my belief that normative gender categories are little more than fiction.

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Knowledge is a social construct, and for this reason, all of the aforementioned people (and countless more) have made contributions to this work in varying degrees. I hope that my readers will contemplate the co-construction of knowledge and think about the types of knowledge that they choose to recirculate.

Introduction (The Parrot Speaks, “Conform or Die”)

A woman can but be excluded by the nature of things, which is the nature of words, and it must be said that if there is something that women themselves complain about enough for the time being, that's it. It's just that they don't know what they're saying – that's the whole difference between them and me.
– Jacques Lacan *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*

Take that to mean that woman does not exist, but that language exists. That woman does not exist owing to the fact that language – a language – rules as master, and that she threatens – as a sort of “prediscursive reality”? – to disrupt its order. – Luce Irigaray *This Sex Which is Not One*

If gender is not an artifice to be taken on or taken off at will, and, hence, not an effect of choice, how are we to understand the constitutive and compelling status of gender norms without falling into the trap of cultural determinism? How precisely are we to understand the ritualized repetition by which such norms produce and stabilize not only the effects of gender but the materiality of sex? And can this repetition, this rearticulation, also constitute the occasion for a critical reworking of apparently constitutive gender norms? – Judith Butler *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of “sex”*

It has been popular to think about the subject or body in terms of construction, whether it be from a Lacanian perspective through discourse and language, or whether it be from a Foucaultian perspective through the strict regulations imposed on the body. It might be fruitful to inquire here as to what implications such theories have instated, and, more specifically, to ask whether such theories that attempt to describe the subject or body as a social construct are not operating in some originating fashion themselves. If there is some sense of truth to the self-fulfilling function of theories that attempt to depict identity or subject formation – whether it be from an essentialist, constructivist, or poststructuralist position – then a theory about active femininity would certainly be the advantageous route to take from a feminist's perspective. Indeed, if theory can be said to serve in a self-fulfilling way, then a theory about active femininity would erase the passivity it was heretofore prescribed and it would necessarily be rewritten as active.

Yet, can a theory about gender and identity formation emerge without being discredited by a theoretical dogmatism, and perhaps more importantly, could a new theory about the body and identity materialize without ending up as a theoretical dogma itself? Although active femininity may not seem socially or psychically threatening to feminists, the very act of defining its borders would constitute prescription, as it would become another way in which to delimit a body. Moreover, its finite exclusivity would not necessarily be enough to destabilize the hegemonic norms that preside over it, nor would active femininity be able to account for those non-beings relegated to abjection. The key issue in normative theories is that they determine “[which] bodies come to matter,” and, in dictating which bodies matter, normative gender categories become forcibly compelled through time.⁶ Hence, rather than propose a theory that would reassert the gender dichotomy – as a theory about active femininity would undoubtedly do – it seems necessary to consider what part the subject plays in its own becoming in order to move past tired gendered binaries and prescribed existences.

Indeed, many female critics have attempted to redefine the feminine in more active terms, but displacing the passivity of femininity has proved a difficult task as these critics commonly highlight the constraints and restrictions that are imposed on their texts by the hegemonic status of *normative theories*. Although their texts exhibit high levels of sophistication and logically-sound argumentation, these specifically *female critics* have established a trend wherein they dismiss the validity of their analyses within the same text, claiming that their ideas are likely to be dismissed on the basis that they had “misunderstood” (usually Lacan). Is this some strange

⁶ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of “sex”* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), x.

rhetorical device? The short answer: yes, probably. Yet, it can also be seen operating on the citational level, when, after commending Luce Irigaray for “read[ing] and reread[ing] the history of philosophy with the kind of detailed attention that she has,” Judith Butler nevertheless concedes that “[Irigaray’s] terms tend to mime the grandiosity of the philosophical errors that she underscores.”⁷ Moreover, Butler goes on to call Irigaray’s “speculative thesis” a “vain mimicry.”⁸ Butler’s analysis raises the question: is mimicry the only platform a woman has?

Is mimicry what Lacan refers to when he states “that’s the whole difference between [women] and [him]” is that “[women] don’t know what they’re saying,” or is it what he is referring to when he theorizes the “not-all” of femininity?⁹ Some critics have interpreted Lacan’s “not-all” of femininity to indicate that there is a part of the feminine that is exempted from the phallic function due to her status as already having been symbolically castrated, which, they claim, enables the feminine position to subvert the phallic order. Slavoj Žižek states that this is a false interpretation. Rather, in “Woman is One of the Names-of-the-Father, or How Not to Misread Lacan’s Formulas of Sexuation,” Žižek refers to the feminine as “all surface, lacking any depth, the unfathomable abyss.”¹⁰ Žižek interprets Lacan’s “not-all” as describing the very essence of sexual differentiation – that is, while the masculine position strives to “out-do” himself in the social sphere in order to cover over the weaknesses he senses within himself, the

⁷ Ibid, 11.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Jacques Lacan, “God and Woman’s jouissance,” *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, trans. Bruce Fink, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998), 73.

¹⁰ Slavoj Žižek, “Woman is One of the Names-of-the-Father, or How Not to Misread Lacan's Formulas of Sexuation,” *Lacanian Ink*, December 31, 2016, <http://www.lacan.com/zizwoman.htm>.

feminine position employs masquerade to cover over “the fact that she in herself is a pure void.”¹¹

Žižek offers a metaphor for this “pure void,” but warns *us* that *we* are “dealing with a kind of convoluted, curved space.”¹² To expound on this convoluted, curved space of femininity, Žižek re-appropriates Zeno’s paradox of Achilles and the tortoise as a frame in which to understand such a notion:

... the male representations (which articulate what woman is “for the other”) endlessly approach the woman-tortoise, yet the moment the man leaps over, overtakes the woman-tortoise, he finds himself again where he already was, within the male representations about what woman is “in herself” – woman’s “in itself” is always already “for the other”. Woman can never be caught, one can never come up with her, one can either endlessly approach her or overtake her, for the very reason that “woman in herself” designates no substantial content but just a purely formal cut, a limit that is always missed – this purely formal cut is the subject qua $\$$. One is thus tempted to paraphrase Hegel again: everything hinges on our conceiving woman not merely as Substance but also as Subject, i.e., on accomplishing a shift from the notion of woman as a substantial content beyond male representations to the notion of woman qua pure topological cut that forever separates the “for the other” from the “in itself”.¹³

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

In other words, woman cannot subvert the phallic function because she can never escape the male representation of her as “for the other” in the social sphere. She, “in herself,” is beyond male representation, and because of this, is socially unintelligible to the masculine position that can only understand her as “for the other,” but more specifically, “for him.” However, the feminine is, in a sense, exempted from part of the phallic function while “in herself,” but as the male representation of her is always articulated as “for the other,” that exempted (“in herself”) part cannot be carried over to subvert the phallic function.

Arguably, it is the feminine position’s subversive capabilities that Žižek takes issue with, not the fact that a part of the feminine *is* exempted from the phallic function. He does not disagree that the woman “in itself” may contain a “substantial content beyond male representations;” yet, because that substantial content is beyond male representations, it can never be realized in the world of masculine representation from which it is strictly debarred.¹⁴ Hence, it could be argued that this male representation of the feminine as always being “for the other” is the very essence of what Butler refers to as a “vain mimicry.” Because she represents a “void” in the world of masculine representation, her words and (dis)guises, which originate from “[with]in herself,” become a vain mimic “for [and of] the other.”

Following Žižek’s interpretation then, it would be impossible for a woman to propose a theory about active femininity and to be taken anymore seriously than a parrot reciting Shakespeare. Hence, the feminine position – or, as Žižek explicitly says, *a woman* – can only exist “for the other.” She plays the part of the muse (“for the other’s” inspiration), the mime (“for the other’s” amusement), and the mirror (“for the other’s” narcissism), but she, “in herself,” can

¹⁴ Ibid.

only truly exist behind her mask. Does Žižek's reinterpretation of Lacan's theory really describe the essence of sexual differentiation, or does it single out the issue with the masculine position and phallogocentrism, in which the feminine position is necessarily implicated in order to assuage a masculine anxiety and to reaffirm a masculine existence? Moreover, how does this theory account for those *other bodies and genders*? Their very omission appears to reassert their non-existence. Žižek's reinterpretation of Lacan's "not-all" of femininity perpetuates the refusal to hear what that "in herself" part may contain and reinstates heteronormative and phallogocentric *agendas* as hegemonic. What seems crucial at this juncture is to move past conventional iterations of "masculine" and "feminine" in order to open up identity to options other than those that are purely heterosexual or that are based on anatomical differentiation.

Žižek's reinterpretation of Lacan's theory leads me to reiterate the question stated earlier: do normative theories about the body somehow operate in an originating function? In other words, do normative theories result in the continual re-construction of normative bodies, identities, and ideas? While one might be tempted to say "no," Žižek's authoritative claim that those other interpretations are incorrect highlights the *regulatory constraints* that normative and hegemonic theories place on the emergence of new bodies, identities, and ideas. Yet the whole point of a theory is to justify phenomena by offering a perspective that allows for the formation of meaning, and not the other way around. Hence, when phenomena become the *effect* of a theory (i.e. the perspective causes the "phenomena-laden-with-meaning" to take shape), the very status of that theory is put into question. Theory, by necessity, cannot be catalytic, as that would make it border on the fringes of prescription, or worse, deterministic constructivism. Can there be a theory about the body that eludes these hegemonic and deterministic trends?

Before proposing a theory that *might* elude the hegemonic and deterministic trends of phallogocentrism, I feel the need to defend the theoretical heaviness of the thesis that follows, especially after suggesting my shaky supposition that theory can have the tendency to be prescriptive when it is raised to a hegemonic status. I do not mean to point this out in order to discredit theory; rather, I mean to highlight this trend of theory-as-prescription in order to caution against theoretical dogmatism. There are – as the idiom states – more ways than one to skin a cat.

Indeed, traditional forms of literary theory have long been used to inform literary criticism, and the increasing number of cultural theories published in the last half century have contributed a breadth of knowledge to both the production of literature and also to literary criticism. This appropriation of contemporary cultural theories to the practice of literary criticism has been necessary in order to analyze texts within the framework of our current socio-political climate. Just as one could argue that literature is supposed to describe the human condition, so too may it be argued that theory is meant to inform literature and the human condition. Likewise, literature influences theory. In this sense, literature and theory interact through a reflexive process, and the importance both have on the production of the other should not be devalued.

The long-established popularity of cultural theory in English departments across institutions attests to this idea. As aforementioned, more attention has been given to cultural theory in the published works of distinguished literary critics during the last half century, and cultural theorists grounded in other disciplines continue to use literature as their artifact for discovery.¹⁵ My own text is greatly indebted to these structural models for their balance of

¹⁵ Examples of this can be seen in the works of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Judith Butler, Jack Halberstam, Lauren Berlant, and Slavoj Žižek.

cultural theory and literature, and especially to those theories and literary works that take the body and identity as central. Indeed, when pondering “the body” and “identity formation” in literary texts, I found that I could not synthesize a thesis without first synthesizing a theory that I had been developing for some time and that has been informed by the works of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault, Slavoj Žižek, Julia Kristeva, and Judith Butler. Their contributions to the fields of psychoanalysis, philosophy, poststructuralism, linguistics, feminism, and gender studies compelled me to engage in the discussion and to proffer my own theories about the body and identity formation in order to provide an alternative lens for the purposes of literary and cultural criticism.

Rather than accepting normative gender theories that reassert the feminine-masculine dichotomy and deny subjective agency, I will explicate texts that resist reductive dichotomies and challenge deterministic constructivism. Simone de Beauvoir’s theory about the subject’s split identity, Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection, and Judith Butler’s supposition about the materiality of the signifier will all play a key role in the thesis that follows. However, in order to show how these theories resist and challenge reductive dichotomies and deterministic constructivism – which I will hereby equate with the notion of phallogocentrism – it is necessary to revisit the philosophies from which these texts diverge. For this reason, I will analyze Michel Foucault’s and Jacques Lacan’s notions of constructivism alongside the aforementioned theories in order to synthesize a hypothesis about the dialectic of naturalization and the transgendered body to which that dialectic gives rise.

Indeed, de Beauvoir’s analysis in *The Second Sex* shows that the subject is *not* a social construct devoid of agency, but that the subject is a reactive, resistant, thoughtful, and self-

reflexive existent that reinterprets, re-conceptualizes, and re-signifies the material world and social norms. de Beauvoir analyzes Lacan's theory about the mirror stage and reinterprets his notion about the mental permanence of the subject's specular *I* as the subject's desire for transcendence and as that which materializes the differentiated perception of the subject's inner identity. Reformulating paranoiac knowledge as abjection, Julia Kristeva demonstrates how the subject's prediscursive knowledge about its fragile and fragmented state is carried over into the symbolic order and forever incites the subject to make meaning when confronted with the unknown. Finally, Judith Butler – building from Ferdinand de Saussure's theory about the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified – suggests that subjects can only approximate the meaning of socially-constructed concepts through the act of citation, and because of this, proposes that *the signifier is a material and malleable thing*. In other words, Butler's theory about the materiality of the signifier's malleability demonstrates how Kristeva's notion of abjection does not result in social unintelligibility, but becomes an opportunity for subjects to displace the sedimentation of phallogocentrism. In this sense, de Beauvoir's theory illustrates how the subject brings about abjection as it cites numerous genders in an attempt to realize the becoming of its inner identity, and how it is *the already transgendered nature of the subject* that enables the subject to offer new concepts in the place of those that have been displaced.

However, if the body is *first* constructed by an external power through either language or strict social regulations (perhaps both), then it would seem apt to examine how this “constructing” primarily takes place. It might be even more accurate to ask: what aspects of power in language or social regulations are responsible for the construction of bodies? In Lacan's

work, the constructing force is typically understood as the “Law of the Father,” and in Foucault’s work, it is usually referred to as the “juridical law.” Although the two appear similar, the Law of the Father should not be conflated with the juridical law, as Lacan was theorizing from a psychoanalytical point of view and Foucault was theorizing from a poststructuralist position. However, what is evident in both theories is the subject’s fear of social disenfranchisement, as the subject’s failure to adhere to the regulatory powers of language or social mores results in the subject’s marginalization within society.

Because Lacan’s and Foucault’s theories were guided by different schools of thought, they approach the subject’s fear of social disenfranchisement in different ways. According to Lacan, human knowledge is structured as paranoid due to the subject’s fragmented state; because everything external to the subject constitutes a threat, the subject always desires to be mediated by the other’s desire in an attempt to feel “whole” again.¹⁶ However, in addition to the subject’s desire to be whole again, the subject likewise desires to maintain a socially-recognizable position in order to avoid social annihilation. In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that subjects are coerced by the regulatory powers of society in order to become socially recognizable. The regulatory powers – in order to encourage civil obedience and remind the populace the consequences of criminality – commonly exhibit the bodies of criminals through public executions and torture. Although Foucault is not typically read from a psychoanalytical perspective, the regulatory powers he describes in *Discipline and Punish*

¹⁶ Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), 76.

nevertheless use the means of psychological terror in order to coerce bodies into assuming socially-acceptable lifestyles.

Hence, to pinpoint the aspect of power that constructs bodies out of a fear of social disenfranchisement, or, what will hereby be referred to as *abjection*, is the normalizing function: *conform or die*. This normalizing function has become so engrained within social intelligibility that it has been elevated to a hegemonic status. Indeed, when a norm is not followed, it appears unnatural to the onlooker. So much value has been placed in the *norm as natural* that the concepts of those *naturalizations* have become sedimented in the social psyche. Judith Butler addresses the sedimentation of social concepts in her book *Bodies that Matter*, and she argues that the sedimentation of social concepts occurs through the practices of normalization and gender performativity. Butler contends that these practices are a type of citationality, which is a concept that she borrows from Jacques Derrida.

Explicating her theory on gender performativity introduced in *Gender Trouble*, Butler uses Derrida's notion of citationality to explain that gender "'performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of production."¹⁷ In this sense, Butler does not believe that the performance of gender is whimsical, as the subject is always already completely entrenched in gendered norms, which places constraints on the subject's agency and the types of performances that can then arise out of those constraints. Moreover, Butler argues that gender

¹⁷ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 60.

performativity is a type of citationality because the subject's performance of gender forces it to cite the larger practice of the gendered norms that precede it. Because the performance of gender involves citing the genders that precede the subject, the performance of gender can only ever produce an approximation of gender. In other words, the citation of gender is performative as a subject can only ever approximate gender through the performance of the citation, and as a citation always belongs to its source, the performance of the citation of gender can never belong to the subject.

Although gender can never belong to the subject, when performed "correctly," the subject nevertheless feels as though it *has* gender. This very feeling that the subject has gender reifies the subject's belief that it is that gender, or at the very least, belongs to a gender. The reification of gender through citationality and performativity is raised to a heightened status, which becomes sedimented as a social concept that has been naturalized. Social norms appear as natural, right, correct, whereas mis-performances appear to be unnatural, abject, degenerate. In this sense, value and status play a large role in the construction and sedimentation of naturalized norms and concepts, which then become dichotomized with the notion of abjection. Because the performance and citation of gender simply produce the socially-constructed sedimentations of gender, Judith Butler, reexamining Lacan's notion of the phallic signifier, argues that the materiality of language also plays a key role in the citation, performance, recirculation, and sedimentation of normative genders. In other words, Butler claims that the materiality of the signifier shapes the ways in which subjects come to understand language, concepts, bodies, and matter in general.

Butler makes the claim that the phallic signifier is material in her chapter, “The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary.” She supports her claim by discussing the indissolubility of language and materiality. That is, she argues that although language and materiality cannot be reduced to one another, they are constantly shaping, or *reformulating*, one another. Because language and matter have influence over the other’s *shape*, Butler discusses the implications of the signifier being phallic: although the phallic signifier cannot be reduced to the penis, it is nevertheless associated with male genitalia and masculinity. Hence, the masculine position is the norm, the natural ruler of signification, and is thereby the privileged position as it belongs to the hegemonic class. Although the masculine position is a construction, it nevertheless refers to the male sex. Puzzled, it seems, Butler returns to Freud to investigate his theories on the libidinal development of the child in order to analyze Lacan’s interpretation.

In the “Ego and the Id,” Butler finds that the penis to which Freud refers is transferable to other body parts. In other words, the body in fragments can become substitutions for the penis. Considering that the anatomically real penis is transferable, Butler argues that the phallic signifier must also be transferable, especially since it has been elevated to the Lacanian symbolic – that which is ostensibly less concrete than the realm of corporeal reality. Following this interpretation of the transferability of the phallic signifier, Butler proposes that subjects should adopt the “lesbian phallus” as a way in which to re-signify cultural norms and hegemonic concepts.

Butler’s proposal that subjects should adopt the lesbian phallus is a call for abjection. She claims that the lesbian phallus becomes a mode in which re-signification can displace cultural

norms and hegemonic concepts from their “proper structural place.”¹⁸ Here, it seems, Butler invokes Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory about the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified. Butler does not necessarily believe that language itself poses an issue, but she does claim that the rigid association between the signifier and its phallogocentrically-determined signified becomes problematic. Butler argues that the ostensibly immutable relationship between the signifier and the signified is what creates the condensation, sedimentation, and naturalization of socially-constructed concepts to form. However, because the interrelation between the signifier and the signified is always arbitrary, the seemingly concretization that forms between the signifier and signified goes against the mutable nature of their relationship. Hence, Butler’s proposal for subjects to re-appropriate the phallic signifier as the lesbian phallus demonstrates how it is through the materiality of the signifier – in its abjection – that the signified to which it is fixed can become displaced.

In this sense, Butler’s theory about the materiality of the signifier shows how the rigid association between the signifier and the signified has resulted in *the sedimentation of socially-constructed concepts*. Because Lacan argues that language determines the consciousness of subjects, the reductive concepts created by phallogocentrism forces subjects to assume the heteronormative prescriptions of society, thereby creating the *stratification* of social intelligibility. Foucault theorizes his concept of “the prison of the body” in relation to the regulatory powers of society, but his theory about the coercive effects of regulatory powers likewise suggests that social intelligibility is created through a reiterative process that creates

¹⁸ Ibid, 55.

socially-constructed sedimentations.¹⁹ Although Foucault refers to the “prison” as the “soul,” it might be more appropriate to understand the interiority of the individual as the subject’s *inner identity*. In this sense, if the union between concepts and language shape reality, the consciousnesses of subjects, and the regulatory powers, then the subject’s identity is restricted from the start. Separated by their respective schools, Lacan and Foucault nevertheless agree that the body is constructed through cultural sediment: the former believes that it occurs through language, while the latter believes that it occurs through social regulations.

Rather than strictly adhering to one of these theories over the other, the analysis that follows will show how the construction of gender and identity occurs through both, but more specifically through the ongoing dialectic of naturalization. That is, if the naturalization of social concepts transpires through the reifications and disputations that subjects encounter linguistically in the regulations of the social sphere, then that constructed knowledge becomes formative of the body, identity, and power. Because reifications and disputations come from other subjects, language and social regulations prove interpretable. In this sense, the dialectic of naturalization illustrates how constructs such as language, gender, sex, and identity are created by human subjects, and as a result, are constantly being reinterpreted, re-conceptualized, re-signified, and recirculated by subjects.

Simone de Beauvoir’s notions of “becoming” and “transcendence” supports the idea of interpretability, but her theory has often been overlooked in this discussion for her emphasis on the subject’s seemingly absolute agency. Indeed, de Beauvoir’s notions of “becoming” and

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), 41.

“transcendence” in *The Second Sex* have often been discredited in the discussion about gender and identity construction, as she appears to claim that there is a choosing agent that is exempted from its social construction. However, like Butler, de Beauvoir does not dismiss the significance of the social sphere and the gendered norms that precede the subject. Indeed, de Beauvoir suggests that while the body may be *capable* of transcendence through its incessant becoming, its anchorage is always located in the social realm of gendered norms. Building from this observation, de Beauvoir proposes that the subject forms two identities: a social identity and an inner identity. While the social identity is constructed from the start due to its acculturation and its sexed status, de Beauvoir argues that the inner identity becomes the locus of becoming and transcendence in the subject.

To make a momentary return to Žižek, de Beauvoir’s notion of the split identity seems to relate to the differentiation between the “in itself” and the “for the other” of the “not-all” of femininity. The inner identity is the place in which transcendence seems possible, but the subject is necessarily limited by its own social identity, and as I will argue, is limited by the assignments it is constantly receiving in the form of reifications and disputations from the social domain.²⁰ To clarify, social intelligibility has a history that is based in the material world, and the phantasmic aspirations of the inner identity in the social domain cannot simply materialize on a whim.

²⁰ The “social domain” is different from Lacan’s “symbolic order,” as the linguistic relations of the social domain are dichotomized with the linguistic structures of the subject’s “inner domain,” as the subject uses language in both domains in order to understand itself and the world. Although the social domain is similar to the symbolic order – as linguistic relations are a key aspect to both – I have chosen to use the phrases “inner domain” and “social domain” rather than use Lacan’s terminology of “imaginary” and “symbolic.” My reason for this is to emphasize that subjects use language in their inner world and the world of objective reality in order to construct meaning. In this sense, the inner and social domains are aspects of the symbolic order.

Rather than accept Žižek's claim that the "in itself" is always missed in the social domain and translated into "for the other," de Beauvoir's belief that the limitations imposed by reality do not halt the becoming of bodies and identities seems more accurate, as subjects are constantly re-interpreting the material world that precedes them, and for that matter, re-conceptualizing and re-signifying the world. According to de Beauvoir's theory, the constant mode of becoming is necessitated by the missed translations between the "in itself" and the "for the other," and it is these misinterpretations, misrecognitions, and disidentifications that impel the desire for transcendence in the social domain and the evolution of social intelligibility.

In accepting the body and identity as coerced constructions, I will also accept de Beauvoir's notions of transcendence and becoming in the text that follows. In other words, I will not consider the subject to be completely constructed by external forces. The materiality of the signifier's transformative and displacing powers transposed into the philosophy of dialectical materialism will be a key point to this argument. If what is at stake is the "prison of the body" – as a result of the social and linguistic regulations used by human subjects – then it seems necessary to consider the ways in which to disentrail this body from those regulations.

If the hegemonic norms of gender are not natural, but are constructs that have become naturalized, then new naturalizations seem possible. However, this claim should not be confused with earlier movements that have attempted to denaturalize the body. Denaturalization is not necessary, if what is natural is to be understood as that which is constructed, and as a result, always already *unnatural*. Indeed, an attempt to denaturalize the body would reaffirm that there is a natural body, and as a result, it would reassert the hegemonic status of the sexed body.

Rather, I will examine the dialectic of naturalization within this text, and from this exposition,

assert that re-naturalization of the body and gender identity is possible under the assumption that what is natural cannot actually be said to exist.

One might ask here, “why is re-naturalization essential?” As indicated in the preface, femininity is not the only gender in jeopardy, as the reality of gender and identity is proliferating and as heteronormative and phallogocentric ideals relegate those proliferative existences to the domain of abjection as non-beings. What seems necessary at this juncture is to transgender the body in order to free it from the reductive shackles of heteronormativity and phallogocentrism. This emancipation must take place first through abjection and then through the re-appropriation of those naturalizing forces that heteronormativity and phallogocentrism employ in order to establish their hegemonic status. The term “transgender” is not meant to refer to the common understanding of the adjective, wherein transgender usually refers to an individual who identifies with the opposite gender of his or her assigned sex. Rather, by re-appropriating “transgender” as a verb, “to transgender the body” will indicate *the move beyond normative gender categories; the re-appropriation of the dialectic of naturalization as a means of naturalizing a proliferation of nonnormative genders; and displacing the reductive sedimentation of phallogocentric and heteronormative signifieds*. Only by transgending the body can subjects finally be freed from the prescriptions and assignments of sex and gender.

Transgending the body through the dialectic of naturalization will compel cultural and literary critics to examine the subtext of the subject. It will become a way in which the fixity of the subject may be dislodged, as it will redefine the subject as a being in a constant state of becoming through the ongoing assignments that necessitate its reformulation. It will challenge the notion that the subject-as-construction is solely produced through language and the

regulations of external forces. If the subject-as-construction means that even in the subject's resistance, nonconformity, and subversion, the subject is nevertheless a product of those very powers, then all subjects "[with]in [themselves]" would encompass a "void." Contrarily, the dialectic of naturalization will depict the subject as always already being transgendered, as it will show that the subject is not a void, but a conglomeration since the subject cites multiple genders throughout its life.

Although the term "transgendered" has fallen out of vogue and has been replaced with the more favorable term "transgender" when referring to an individual who identifies with the opposite gender of his or her assigned sex, for the purpose of this work, the term "transgendered" refers to the subject that has already undergone the process of transgendering via the dialectic of naturalization; in this sense, the term transgendered indicates that the subject is not the gender that it appears to be, but that it is many genders. However, in order for subjects to eschew the social prescriptions of normative genders, it is through an examination of the dialectic of naturalization that will clarify the aspect of the human subject that escapes the powers of external regulations and signification. Hence, the dialectic of naturalization will demonstrate how this escape is made possible through the prediscursive knowledge of the subject and the mental permanence of the subject's differentiated perception, as both resist symbolization and the coercion of regulatory powers in spite of their social inscription.

It is this notion that is dramatized in Jeanette Winterson's postmodern novel *Sexing the Cherry*. Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* is often described as a postmodern text that explores the notions of space, time, materiality, language, and identity. Set in two centuries, the seventeenth and twentieth, dissenters and fans alike have been reluctant to accept the ideas

presented in the text for its experimentation with narrative, its exploration of fragmented characters, its resistance to linearity, and its apparently lesbian agenda. Although the text belongs to the genre of fiction, it might as easily belong to the philosophical tradition for its epistemological and ontological musings about the nature of reality. In spite of its resistance to an Aristotelian structure, Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* provides a fruitful lens in which to examine the ways her characters – the Dog-Woman, Jordan, Nicolas Jordan, and the chemist – navigate the seemingly coercive and normalizing forces of their respective worlds as they struggle to find themselves and a space and time to which they belong. Winterson's particular focus on the early modern and the postmodern periods should not be dismissed as inconsequential, as the three-hundred-year omission of modernism suggests Winterson's desire to free her characters from the effects that the Industrial Revolution brought about as described by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*.

Winterson's exclusion of the modernist era suggests the dependency her characters have on forming their identities in opposition to modernism – a mindset that not only brought about the automaton that Foucault describes, but also heteronormativity, gender conformity, Michael Kimmel's "Marketplace Man," and the woman's subjugation. In this way, Winterson's omission of modernism does not do away with its regulatory powers or ideologies, as her characters still feel the constraints modernism imposes on their identities. Instead, Winterson shows how the subject's coerced construction and self-construction are constantly at odds, as the mental permanence of her characters' differentiated perceptions constantly challenges the reality of the world and the intelligibility of their social constructions.

Hence, Winterson's characters are not mere automatons of the culture that created them, nor do they subscribe to strictly heteronormative existences, as she depicts them as fragmented subjects that attempt to self-persevere in worlds that demand their conformity. In this way, Winterson depicts her characters and their experiences as utterly human. Yet critics have accused the text of misandry and Winterson of androphobia for depicting many of the male characters in an unfavorable light. In his article "Innovation Without Tears," Gary Krist asks, "And am I unjustified in complaining that the book is a little unfair to men?"²¹ And, in "Gender in Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*," Paul Kintzele states, "Further evidence of a sweeping indictment of all men can be found in the 'rule book' that the Dog-Woman's adopted son, Jordan, reads; in it, men are portrayed as basically shallow, unreliable, and selfish."²² Kintzele asks, "Is this not a prime example of the kind of dismissive, totalizing thinking that hampered the efficacy of the feminist movement in past decades?"²³ In his article "Writing a History of Difference: Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and Angela Carter's *Wise Children*," Jeffrey Roessner states, "Winterson rejects linear temporality and endorses an apocalyptic urge to escape history and the power structures of a male-dominated society. In this way, *Sexing the Cherry* risks lapsing into the very kind of countersexism that Kristeva cautions against."²⁴ These accusations of misandry, androphobia, and countersexism, although not *wholly* unfounded, miss the point of

²¹ Gary Krist, "Innovation without Tears," *The Hudson Review* 43, no. 4 (1991): 696.

²² Paul Kintzele, "Gender in Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 12, no. 3 (2010): 4.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Jeffrey Roessner, "Writing a History of Difference: Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and Angela Carter's *Wise Children*," *College Literature* 29, no. 1 (2002): 104.

the text as a whole and reveal how *Sexing the Cherry* often challenges normative concepts that give rise to biased readings.

Rather than subscribing to such interpretations, I will argue that *Sexing the Cherry* attempts to displace the hegemonic structure of phallogocentrism by allegorizing the notion of reductive narcissism through the corporations and the hypocritical Puritans that the chemist and the Dog-Woman oppose. Indeed, Winterson does succeed in depicting some of her male characters in a positive light – as portrayed through her characterizations of Jordan, John Tradescant, King Charles I, and Nicolas Jordan – and this indicates that Winterson’s text does not set out with an agenda to vilify all men. *Sexing the Cherry* explores the notion of subjective interpretation through a proliferation of narratives, displacing the sedimentation of phallogocentrism, and naturalizing and humanizing the main characters even when they resist conformity and perform seemingly unforgivable acts.

Although Winterson attempts to displace the sedimentation of phallogocentrism in *Sexing the Cherry*, she does not lapse into a countersexist rhetoric. Roessner’s claim that Winterson attempts to “develop a counter-historical framework that naturalizes lesbian desire” is a fair assertion to make, but *Sexing the Cherry*’s examination of gender goes beyond the re-naturalization of lesbian desire.²⁵ Winterson explores the practice of displacing and disrupting the reiteration of socially-constructed sedimentations, phallogocentrism, and the masculinist signifying chain in order to naturalize and give credit to other existences that are commonly marginalized in mainstream (phallogocentric) stories and culture. In this sense, Winterson’s endeavor to naturalize lesbian desire does not extend to an attempt to supplant or disparage

²⁵ Ibid, 105.

heterosexuality or male homosexuality as Roessner argues, as Winterson does not only strive to naturalize lesbianism, but also asexuality, unlikely friendships, and the transgendered body in order to demonstrate how relationships and identities exist outside of those that are purely male-centered or that celebrate male homosociality.

Winterson displaces the centrality of masculinity and maleness by using a split narrative, wherein Jordan, the Dog-Woman, Nicolas Jordan, and the chemist are given an equal space in which they can tell their stories from their own perspectives. Signifying who is about to speak by placing a pineapple and a cleft pineapple before Jordan's and Nicolas Jordan's narratives, and a banana and a sliced banana before the Dog-Woman's and the chemist's narratives, Winterson destabilizes the linearity that is associated with most fiction and embraces the proliferation of differentiated perspectives that this form offers. Although the majority of the text is narrated by the aforementioned characters, Winterson also gives individual narratives to the Twelve Dancing Princesses who relay the stories of their lives after marriage; in this sense, Winterson uses the princesses' stories in order to alter the traditional – and phallogocentric – form of the fairy tale.

The Twelve Dancing Princesses' stories are comprised of gruesome events, “in which they abandon or kill abusive, repressive, or unfaithful husbands,” thereby problematizing the text and substantiating the arguments that condemn *Sexing the Cherry* as countersexist.²⁶ Moreover, the Dog-Woman's mutilation and murder of a number of Puritans – which peaks with her brutal and grotesque murder of Preacher Scroggs and Neighbor Firebrace in the brothel – further validates the critics that condemn the text as androphobic. To make matters worse, the violence

²⁶ Angela Marie Smith, “Fiery Constellations: Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and Benjamin's Materialist Historiography,” *College Literature* 32, no. 3 (2005): 28.

that is done against these male characters is brushed aside as the novel simply continues. Because Winterson does not address the implications of this violence, she offers her audience no sense of relief. However, these tales take place in the queer space of the seventeenth century, which suggests that the events do not actually occur, but are the fantastic imaginings of Nicolas/Jordan and the chemist/Dog-Woman “who, anxious to be free of the burdens of their gender,” dream of displacing the coercive and normalizing powers of heteronormativity and phallogocentrism with brute force.²⁷ Hence, the male characters who are murdered at the hands of the Twelve Dancing Princesses and the Dog-Woman stand for those very powers.

Although many critics have noted the emphasis placed on multiplicity in *Sexing the Cherry*, and for that matter, the connections Jordan and the Dog-Woman share with the more realistic characters Nicolas Jordan and the chemist, few have acknowledged the significance behind the characters’ associations with one another. The failure to make sense of the connections between the seventeenth- and twentieth-century characters further problematizes the violence done against men in the sections that are narrated by Jordan and the Dog-Woman, as most scholars interpret Jordan and the Dog-Woman as the main characters when they suggest that Nicolas Jordan and the chemist are *their* modern-day counterparts. Although the majority of the text is given to the narratives of Jordan and the Dog-Woman, the world that they inhabit is teeming with fantastic occurrences that defy realism and rationality, which can be seen when the Dog-Woman catapults an elephant into the sky with her massive weight and in any one of Jordan’s adventures that rarely leave him anchored to a world that is recognizable.

²⁷ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989), 28.

Although the critics who interpret Jordan and the Dog-Woman as the main characters nevertheless note the emphasis Winterson places on the fantastic in the seventeenth century, few critics have considered the literary purpose of fantasy in *Sexing the Cherry*. However, in the article “Sexing the Text: Narrative Drag as Feminist Poetics and Politics in Jeanette Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry*,” Elizabeth Langland notes that the Dog-Woman is “an imaginary woman,”²⁸ and in the article “Multiple Selves and Grafted Agents: A Postmodernist Reading of *Sexing the Cherry*,” Bente Gade suggests that “the Dog-Woman in the seventeenth century may be a projection of [the chemist’s] rage – her monstrous *alter ego*.”²⁹ Later in her article, Gade extends this interpretation of the Dog-Woman’s function to that of Jordan’s when she states that “Identity as narrative may explain the function of the seventeenth century narrators: they are Nicolas’ and the chemist’s attempt to escape the restricting norms of their culture by narrativizing their lives and thus tell who they *really* are – or their experienced identity.”³⁰ Hence, Gade, in a brilliant synthesis of cultural theories and *Sexing the Cherry*, discerns that Jordan and the Dog-Woman are not real people who simply share similarities to the 1990’s characters, but are manifestations of Nicolas Jordan and the chemist, and as I will suggest, the *inner identities of Nicolas Jordan and the chemist*.

By interpreting Jordan and the Dog-Woman as inner identities, the violence enacted against men in their narratives is lessened, as the violence does not actually take place within the

²⁸ Elizabeth Langland, “Feminist Poetics and Politics in *Sexing the Cherry*,” *Narrative* 5, no. 1 (1997): 102.

²⁹ Bente Gade, “Multiple Selves and Grafted Agents: A Postmodernist Reading of *Sexing the Cherry*,” in *Sponsored by Demons: The Art of Jeanette Winterson*, ed. Marianne Bengston, Marianne Børch, and Cindie Maagaard (Copenhagen: Scholar’s Press, 1999), 34.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 37.

realistic realm of the text, but in the imaginations of the characters that *Sexing the Cherry* depicts. However, in suggesting that Jordan and the Dog-Woman are the inner identities of Nicolas and the chemist, I do not mean to discredit the substantial contributions the seventeenth-century characters make in the novel, nor do I mean to suggest that they are “imaginary” as Langland does. Indeed, in spite of their often fantastic adventures and experiences, Winterson nevertheless depicts Jordan and the Dog-Woman as thoughtful and complex characters who are an essential part of Nicolas and the chemist. By suggesting that they are the inner identities of Nicolas and the chemist, I mean to highlight that the violence exhibited in *Sexing the Cherry* only takes place in the minds of the main characters, and that these violent fantasies appear to be Nicolas’ and the chemist’s reactions to the normalizing forces that they believe are trying to encroach upon their inner worlds.

In this sense, Winterson does not set out with an agenda to vilify men, as she gives equal space to her male and female characters who narrativize their alienating experiences in a world that has been structured by the coercive and normalizing forces of phallogocentrism. Gade notes, “In the twentieth century both the chemist and Nicolas are expected to adhere to the gender norms that are related to their sex: Nicolas is expected to be ambitious and heroic while the chemist is advised to abandon her aggressive political project, and smile, and marry and ‘do worthy work behind the scenes.’”³¹ In accepting that Jordan and the Dog-Woman are the inner identities of the twentieth-century characters – and for that matter, Nicolas’ and the chemist’s attempt to escape the coercive powers of their world – Winterson demonstrates how her fragmented characters are only able to transcend the societal prescriptions they are expected to

³¹ Ibid.

assume as transgendered subjects. By depicting both of her characters as transgendered subjects at the end of *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson makes evident that it is only transgendered subjects who have the power to displace the sedimentation of heteronormativity and phallogocentrism. Because Jordan and the Dog-Woman and Nicolas and the chemist come together to form a collective group at the end of the novel, Winterson shows how the re-conceptualization, re-signification, and re-naturalization of displaced concepts is only possible through the collective and proliferative efforts of transgendered subjects.

Chapter One

The Prisoner Emancipated: Transgendering the Body through the Subject's Inner Identity

As a form of power, subjection is paradoxical. To be dominated by a power external to oneself is a familiar and agonizing form power takes. To find, however, that what "one" is, one's very formation as a subject, is in some sense dependent upon that very power is quite another. We are used to thinking of power as what presses on the subject from the outside, as what subordinates, sets underneath, and relegates to a lower order. This is surely a fair description of part of what power does. But if, following Foucault, we understand power as *forming* the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are. – Judith Butler *The Psychic Life of Power*

But if there is no subject who decides on its gender, and if, on the contrary, gender is part of what decides the subject, how might one formulate a project that preserves gender practices as sites of critical agency? If gender is constructed through relations of power and, specifically, normative constraints that not only produce but also regulate various bodily beings, how might agency be derived from this notion of gender as the effect of productive constraint? – Judith Butler *Bodies that Matter*

Where has all the free-will gone? It seems as though the growing popularity of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Foucaultian poststructuralism has completely stripped the subject of any and all agency. If the subject can only know itself through the ways in which it is hailed, or, interpellated into a situation or ideology (in the Althusserian sense), then would it not stand to reason that the subject is, "in itself," a "pure void?" Although a ludicrous proposition, it would seem as though the withdrawal of those very formative powers would leave the non-coerced body as nothing, a nonentity, a non-being. In the absurdly hypothetical scenario of the body-sans-construction, what would happen to the materiality of the body? Would the social psyche drive it back into the realm of disembodiment, or would its very materiality resist such exertions and allow it to remain in a state of psychic nonexistence? Although Lacan has made solid points about the linguistic structure of the consciousness – that is to say, subjects can only *think or know* that which language allows – the latter option seems more likely. If the materiality of the body cannot be thought away, or *disappear on the account of our inability to think it*, then how might

we understand it? Will we be necessarily limited by the inherent lack of language, or will its very existence demand that a new language form?

Rather than speculate on the effect of a non-constructed body in a linguistically-invested economy, I consider it prudent to discuss the limits that external powers may have on the formation of subjects. If it can be said that there is an aspect of the subject that plays a part in its own construction, then an inquiry into what has been written on the body and subject formation is necessary. Although Lacan has had a significant impact on the ideas that follow, I will instead analyze Butler's theory about the materiality of the phallic signifier in order to illustrate that there is an aspect of psychic life that is pre-discursively formed and that the materiality of the signifier makes the subject's self-construction possible. Because the historical and reiterative constructions of the body problematize the idea of self-construction, I will take into account Foucault's observations about the role external forces play in the formation of the criminal subject as characterized in *Discipline and Punish*. Although the imprisoned body that Foucault describes is merely an automaton programmed by the culture, his claim that the body becomes manipulable through the rigorous discipline of the details shows how it is social regulations – rather than *nature* – that shape the body. However, what will be more important to the argument presented in this chapter is Foucault's description of the *changeability* of the material body.

Simone de Beauvoir, accepting construction as acculturation, demonstrates that the subject, forever coming into a state of self-awareness, acquires a split identity. Although the subject is limited by its social identity through its acculturation, de Beauvoir suggests that the subject's inner identity nevertheless exists in a state that is always striving for transcendence. The

negotiation of the subject's split identity allows the body to materialize as a situation; the subject is not a static construction devoid of agency, but desires to transcend its social prescriptions. In this sense, the subject represents a mode of becoming as it proves to be a self-constructing and self-reflexive entity. Counter to deterministic constructivism, de Beauvoir's ideas on the formation of the subject mediate coerced construction with self-construction. Indeed, de Beauvoir's existentialist beliefs do not allow her to discount the cultural and corporeal reality of the body, nor do they allow her to discredit the various interactions that individuals encounter throughout their lives, as her theory indicates that the body becomes many things throughout an individual's life.

By reexamining the ideas laid out by Butler, Foucault, and de Beauvoir, it becomes apparent that the agency of the subject has not been lost in the discussion about the formation of subjects. Although Butler portrays the ways in which the subject is constrained by the social regulations dictated by culture, language, and history, her theory about the materiality of the signifier shows that there is a prediscursivity to the psychic life of subjects which later provides subjects with the ability to re-conceptualize matter and language. In this sense, Butler's theory provides a frame to Simone de Beauvoir's dichotomous formulation about the subject's "acculturation" and "choice," as de Beauvoir claims that the subject both submits itself to the regulatory powers and also seeks to depose the regulations imposed on its body through transcendence. de Beauvoir's theory about the subject's becoming demonstrates how the self-manipulability of the body is constrained by Foucault's notion of the regulatory ideal and made possible through the differentiated perception of the subject's inner identity and the materiality of the signifier.

Following these interpretations of Butler's and de Beauvoir's theories, I will suggest that the body can never entirely become its gender-as-sex, as, in wanting to transcend its body, the subject cites a number of gendered positions throughout its life. By citing a number of gendered positions throughout the subject's life, the subject confuses traditional gender binaries, which indicates that the body – regardless of sex – is always already transgendered. Because the de Beauvoirian subject strives to transcend the coerced constructions imposed on it by the regulatory powers, it exists in a simultaneous negotiation between coerced construction and self-construction, and it is the subject's constant attempts to author its self-construction within the terms and limits of its own palimpsestic historicity that explodes the gender dichotomy.

In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler claims that “language and materiality” are “[always] already implicated in each other, always already exceeding one another.”³² Building from the Lacanian notion about the linguistic structures of the consciousness, Butler specifically stresses how language *shapes the subject's perception of matter and reality*; in this sense, she exposes the problematic body-mind dyad. To explicate her supposition, Butler analyzes Freud's and Lacan's libidinal development theories in relation to both the formation of the subject and also to the phenomenality of language. In the chapter “The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary,” Butler argues that although the phallus cannot be reduced to the penis, the very formulation that men “have” the phallus and women “appear as” the phallus indicates that the anatomically real penis has been *displaced* onto the phallic signifier, which privileges the masculine position in taking up the phallic signifier; in other words, Butler's analysis exposes

³² Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of “sex”* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 38.

how Lacan's theory situates the masculine position as the signifier of language. Rather than understanding Lacan's "phallus" as the gender-neutral signifier that some feminists originally understood it to be, Butler finds Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud's "castration complex" as having a "presence" and "absence" effect in both sexes to be a mere reiteration of Freud's castration complex.

Dissatisfied with Lacan's reformulation of Freud's libidinal development theory that purports that subjects are constructed as their gender-as-sex, Butler reexamines Freud's theories to assess the validity of the Lacanian supposition. In her reexamination of Freud's "The Ego and the Id," Butler discovers that the real penis is transferable, as Freud claims that other body parts become substitutes for the erotogenic zones. Understanding the symbolic transferability of the anatomically real penis, Butler argues that Lacan's phallic signifier must also be transferable (despite its tendency to privilege the masculine position) because of its already symbolic status.

Butler notes that the displacement of the anatomically real penis onto the phallic signifier poses an obstacle for the feminine position (and other genders) to appropriate the signifier, as it gives the signifier a materiality that is strictly associated with the masculine position and, as aforementioned, places the masculine position as the hegemonic ruler of language. By showing how Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis often conflate the penis-as-male-organ (sign) with the phallus (signifier), and how that conflated penis-phallus can only be mimicked or reiterated as opposed to 'had' or 'possessed,' Butler argues that the phallic signifier becomes a symbolic materiality because of its association with the male organ. Moreover, she suggests that despite the privilege on which the phallic signifier dubs the masculine position, the signifier can

nevertheless be transferred and used by non-masculine subjects due to the necessary lack of the sign (penis-as-male-organ) to which the signifier refers.

Butler concludes that the signifier is a materiality on the premise that matter has already been constructed through the use of language. Because language has already constructed all matter, Butler argues that materiality and language are indissociable – they are not *irreducible* to one another as they are not the same, but they are always already implicated in each other. Building on the idea that language and matter are indissociable, Butler claims that the very task of accessing pure materiality would demand that it be done through materiality itself, without the use of language. Indeed, in “The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary,” she claims that “the materiality of the signifier (a ‘materiality’ that comprises both signs and their significatory efficacy) implies that there can be no reference to a pure materiality except via materiality.”³³ In an interesting twist, Butler claims that “it is not that one cannot get outside of language in order to grasp materiality in and of itself; rather, every effort to refer to materiality takes place through the signifying process which, in its phenomenality, is always already material.”³⁴

It seems unlikely that one could in fact “get outside of language,” as the endeavor would require that the subject – who has presumably entered the Lacanian symbolic and come into language – loses language.³⁵ Although Butler suggests that one could get outside of language, her emphasis is on “grasp[ing] materiality” as opposed to “understanding materiality.”³⁶ One could

³³ Ibid, 37.

³⁴ Ibid, 37-8.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

get outside of language in order to grasp materiality, but in order to understand a pure materiality, every effort becomes a further formulation of that materiality. Butler acknowledges that materiality exists outside of the constructions of language, but she argues that subjects can never *understand* materiality outside of language as language provides an interpretative context to the material world, which in turn, becomes formative of how the subject understands and experiences the world.

Although Butler theorizes that the signifier is material, she qualifies her hypothesis by suggesting that its materiality cannot be collapsed with the materiality of the sign to which it is trying to signify as the two materialities are different. They are not one-in-the-same as the signifier “tree” is not the same as that thing growing in the earth, but as that thing growing in the earth has been displaced onto the linguistic term “tree,” the signifier “tree” becomes a materiality. According to this interpretation of the signifier, the signifier is still symbolic and predicated on lack as the sign’s materiality has a different form than the signifier’s materiality (the signifier can never contain the sign), but as the sign has been displaced within the signifier as the *signified*, the signifier assumes a materiality based on the concept that becomes tied to it, which becomes a further formulation of the sign *conceptually*.

In this rather confusing formulation, Butler distinguishes between the materialities of the signified and the referent – or the real – and claims that the referent can only be approximated by the signified through the iteration of the signifier, which creates the signifier’s materiality.³⁷

³⁷ Although Butler’s theory about the materiality of the signifier may seem confusing, her theory essentially elaborates on Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory about the role the signified plays in the acquisition of language. In other words, Butler claims that the signified – which acts as a placeholder for the sign – becomes formative of the signifier’s *conceptual materiality*.

Butler substantiates this argument through her interpretation of Julia Kristeva's theories about the lost maternal body, the imaginary, and vocalization. Through her understanding of Kristeva's work, Butler observes that the reiterative and already "psychically invested" "material sputterings" that occur in the imaginary stage are an attempt to recover the lost maternal body as boundaries break down.³⁸ The infant's attempt to recover the lost maternal body and negotiate its dawning realization of differentiated relations "is displaced onto the materiality of linguistic relations... [and] it is only on the condition of this primary loss of the referent, the Real, understood as the maternal presence, that signification – and the materialization of language – can take place."³⁹

Butler's exegesis of Lacan via Kristeva suggests that the child in the imaginary stage constantly displaces the object of its desire – in this case, the lost maternal presence – onto its "psychically-invested," "material sputterings" (or its developing linguistic relations), which in turn, creates the signified and reassigns it to the signifier.⁴⁰ The materiality of the signifier then becomes a further construction of the sign as it sets the phantasmic boundaries that confer the sign's intelligibility by means of the signified to which the signifier and the sign become tied. In other words, rather than understanding the sign, signified, and signifier as discrete semiotic units, Butler underscores the connections between the sign, signified, and signifier, and in this sense, how the manipulation of one affects the shape or meaning of the others. Counter to Jacques Lacan's theory of the phallic signifier, which, in a monumental moment, signifies beings into

³⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 69-70.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

subjects and brings them into language, Butler uses Kristeva's theory to illustrate that the materiality of the signifier begins to take place prior to The Law of the Father and the subject's ascension into the Lacanian symbolic.

Butler's theory about the materiality of the signifier is relevant to a reexamination of gender construction, as it moves away from Lacan's "Aha!" moment of sexual differentiation and explores the prediscursivity of that moment through the negotiations made in the imaginary stage. Although Lacan claims that differentiation between mother and child occurs in the imaginary stage, his emphasis on the child's desire to return to the real in order to be whole again fails to explain the significance behind the child's vocalizations beyond the psychological lack with which he associates them. Contrarily, the emphasis Kristeva and Butler place on *vocalization and hence, the materialization of the signifier in the imaginary* as a result of that differentiation, offers a redress to Lacan's theories that promote the construction of normative sexuality and gender identity and privilege the masculine position. Their theories depict the materiality of the signifier to be open to interpretation and re-signification because of the differentiated perception that forms in the individual prior to a full immersion in language.

As a result, the materiality of the signifier becomes a path in which the subject's self-construction may be possible, as the materiality of the signifier illustrates that there is an aspect of the individual that is exempt from the Law of the Father's signifying powers wherein subjects are coerced to assume their gender-as-sex. This exemption is made possible because of the *already-formed prediscursive perceptions that the infant develops during the imaginary stage* and the mutable nature of the materiality of the signifier. In Butler's words:

Inasmuch as the phallus signifies, it is also always in the process of being signified and resignified. In this sense, it is not the incipient moment or origin of a signifying chain, as Lacan would insist, but part of a reiterative signifying practice and, hence, open to resignification: signifying in ways and in places that exceed its proper structural place. If the phallus is a privileged signifier, it gains that privilege through being reiterated. And if the cultural construction of sexuality compels a repetition of that signifier, there is nevertheless in the very force of repetition, understood as resignification or recirculation, the possibility of deprivileging that signifier.⁴¹

In this sense, re-signification and self-construction become possible because the signifier is a material and variable thing. Because Butler's theory about the materiality of the signifier reveals that language and concepts are always already inscribed on the physical world, she demonstrates how the material world has already been constructed through language *and* how the material world is constantly re-constructed through language. Moreover, Butler claims that the variability of the signifier's materiality allows subjects to appropriate the phallic signifier, and because of this, that hegemonic concepts can be re-signified through a proliferation of interpretations.

In order to illustrate how the materiality of the phallic signifier is transferable and thus able to be re-appropriated, re-signified, and reiterated in new ways, Butler proposes that the 'lesbian phallus' has to be taken up by individuals to disrupt the masculinist signifying chain of the phallic signifier. Because the phallic signifier becomes a privileged, reiterated practice

⁴¹ Ibid, 55.

through the masculine subjects that adopt it, Butler suggests that the lesbian phallus can upset its privilege, as the act of re-signifying the phallic signifier in “places that exceed its proper structural place” will not only open up the signifier to reinterpretation, but also displace the privilege of the masculine position.⁴² Hence, by showing the ways in which the signifier is material, Butler reveals that the signifier is a social construction that can be manipulated by subjects. Although the Lacanian signifier signifies subjects, it also brings subjects into language where they then become signifying subjects. In this sense, the phallic signifier is not the only signifying or constructing entity, as signifying subjects can also re-signify or re-construct the material world.

By recognizing the signifier as a material reality, the discussion about the formation of the subject is no longer a debate between what is natural and what is constructed, as Butler reveals that what is natural has always already been constructed through language. Rather, the discussion has now become a *question of how reiterations become reified and sedimented over time*, and whether the self-construction of the subject through the use of Butler’s lesbian phallus is feasible within the terms of those socially-constructed sedimentations.

Because the materiality of the signifier reveals that everything taken to be natural has in fact only been constructed or *naturalized*, the sedimentation of socially-constructed concepts appears to be susceptible to the variability of the materiality of the signifier. In other words, the social construction of reality becomes vulnerable to re-conceptualization because of the signifier’s materiality; indeed, according to Butler’s theory, socially-constructed concepts are

⁴² Ibid, 89.

always vulnerable to reinterpretation, and hence, re-signification. However, Butler states that this does not mean that re-signification can take place on a whim, as the objective reality of the world does take precedence over the ways in which individual subjects are able to re-conceptualize ideas, social customs, bodies, etc. In other words, a re-signification only becomes intelligible if it can be cited or reiterated, as Butler states that “[re-signification] does not mean that *any* action is possible on the basis of a discursive effect.”⁴³ Discursive effects and even the reiterations of those effects will quickly fizzle out if they are “barely legible as reiterations.”⁴⁴ Hence, discursive effects must be conceptually clear in order to be intelligible to other subjects and in order to be adopted and recirculated by other subjects. However, the signifier is nevertheless vulnerable to reinterpretation, as Butler points out how language and matter are always implicated in one another while simultaneously exceeding one another.

Although Butler’s theory offers a platform on which the reinterpretation of gender seems possible, one issue with the task of exposing normative sexuality and gender identity as socially-constructed concepts is their hegemonic status and ostensibly natural appearance, as subjects are coerced into assuming normative gender identities, *but are often unknowingly coerced into assuming those positions*. Throughout her work, Butler argues that the hegemonic value that is placed on normative sexuality and gender identity makes the assumption of gender-as-sex appear natural, which in turn, becomes a regulatory power in society by the subjects who forcibly reiterate and recirculate the ideals of heteronormativity. Michel Foucault addresses this idea through his notion of the “regulatory ideal,” and Butler argues that Foucault’s theory about the

⁴³ Ibid, 139.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

regulatory ideal demonstrates how ‘sex’ itself has become a regulatory practice. In this sense, the regulatory ideal and the natural appearance of sex and gender place constraints on gender and identity, and because of this, they also impose limitations on the subject’s agency and self-construction.

Arguably, the natural appearance of gender-as-sex is a safe concept because its very construction is socially intelligible, and because it offers an intelligible safety net in a seemingly chaotic world, the regulatory ideal of gender-as-sex necessitates its own reiteration. Within the first page of *Bodies That Matter*, Butler states that “[the] category of ‘sex’ is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a ‘regulatory ideal.’”⁴⁵ In being normative from the start, the category of sex and its natural status is problematic, as its ostensible naturalness compels and confines bodies to assume what appears to be natural modes of being (masculine/feminine), but what are actually unnatural – and potentially detrimental – constructs for the limitations they impose on a subject’s identity. Although Butler argues that language and matter can become re-conceptualized through the subject’s resignifications, the regulatory ideal is a privileged, albeit fictitious, socially-constructed sedimentation, and the risk subjects face when they try to self-construct themselves outside of the regulatory ideal is that their self-construction can fall outside of the realm of intelligibility, which can lead to “ostracism and even [social] death.”⁴⁶

Butler states how the category of sex – which will henceforth be understood as a *sedimented naturalization* – “is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it

⁴⁵ Ibid, xi.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 60.

governs.”⁴⁷ Although the phrase “regulatory ideal” seems to suggest that the body is static and is forever only its sex, Butler’s theory about the materiality of the signifier shows how the regulatory ideal – despite the biological connotations it carries – is simply a construct that has been sedimented over time through its constant reiteration. Although I have outlined the risks subjects face when attempting to self-construct themselves outside of the regulatory ideal, because the regulatory ideal is merely a sedimented naturalization, the re-conceptualization and re-signification of the regulatory ideal is nevertheless possible. Indeed, Butler claims that Foucault’s notion of the “regulatory ideal” is a “changeable ideal,” and she argues that the act of questioning gender becomes “the occasion in which we come to understand that what we take to be ‘real,’ what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality.”⁴⁸ However, by aligning myself with Butler about the malleability of gender and sex, I undoubtedly open myself to criticism. In other words, like Butler, I contend that the way in which anatomical differentiation is understood is changeable.

In this sense, I do not mean to claim that the power of the discursive effect is capable of sexual reassignment, as male-to-female and female-to-male transformations still require that an individual undergoes surgery.⁴⁹ In many ways then, sex as anatomical differentiation *is* static, as the materiality of the signifier cannot alter the corporeal reality of the body; however, the body should not be understood as forever only being its *sex as anatomical differentiation*, which is what occurs when subjects re-appropriate the regulatory ideal according to its phallogocentric

⁴⁷ Ibid, xi.

⁴⁸ Ibid, xxiv.

⁴⁹ In the event that my facetious use of the word “still” is taken seriously, I will clarify my diction by admitting that I do not believe that the discursive effect will ever be capable of altering the corporeal reality of the body.

and heteronormative representations. The category of sex “produces the bodies it governs;” in other words, it categorizes and groups bodies based on anatomical differentiation, which becomes the basis for those bodies’ reformulation within the terms of the category or group to which the subject’s sexed body belongs.⁵⁰ Indeed, the reification and reiteration of gender-as-sex can be seen in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, as well as other theories that attempt to show how the body is constructed, as male is continually re-conceived as masculine, and as female, in its ideality, is reconstructed as feminine.

When based on the hegemonic understanding of anatomical differentiation, the regulatory ideal works at fabricating and commanding the bodies it controls. Posing as a natural fact, its power to shape, manipulate, and coerce bodies into socially-intelligible, gendered categories allows the practice of the construction and re-construction of heteronormativity to be reiterated over time. Because the regulatory ideal constantly formulates and reformulates bodies into specific gender categories, the regulatory ideal, as Butler argues, is nevertheless a changeable ideal since it reveals that the body is *manipulable*. Because Foucault is famous for his radical conception of the body-as-complete-construct, Butler’s interpretation of the regulatory ideal’s changeability fits well with the rest of Foucault’s work, as his notion of the regulatory ideal appears to be more than a construct that manipulates and constructs bodies into specific gendered categories. Indeed, Butler argues that the force with which the regulatory ideal coerces subjects into assuming their gender-as-sex is similar to the regulatory power of the juridical law Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish*.

⁵⁰ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of “sex”* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), xi.

Because Foucault portrays the absolute manipulability of the body throughout his work, his ideas challenge the idea that there is a natural body. In this sense, Foucault does not believe that the static physicality of the world and the somaticism of the beings that occupy it are what shape social intelligibility. Rather, Foucault proposes that the body is shaped completely by the external forces of regulatory powers (through the use of prohibitions, taboos, and laws), and he argues that it is social intelligibility that coerces bodies into assuming recognizable, yet impotent, social positions.

I will return to Foucault's theory about the regulatory ideal to further elaborate on the problematic, but seemingly requisite, constraints it imposes on the body in terms of gender and identity, but before doing so, I consider it necessary to examine the manipulable body Foucault details in *Discipline and Punish*. In the chapter "Docile Bodies," Michel Foucault discusses the ways in which new mechanisms of power for controlling the body were developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a way to transform the populace into docile bodies for an increased social utility. Although Foucault's exploration of the topic is mainly through the military body and the body of the soldier, he illustrates how the practice was transposed into other social organizations and institutions such as schools, hospitals, and the various workforces that the Industrial Revolution brought about. Through his historiographical research, Foucault shows how the practice of coercing bodies into docility quickly permeated *every aspect of society*.

While the chapter does not specifically relate the coercion of bodies into docility to the coercion of bodies into heteronormativity (or heterosexuality), the meticulous process of

subjecting bodies into docility that Foucault highlights is reminiscent of the practice of gender policing when he notes that “in every society, the body was in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions or obligations.”⁵¹ As Butler notes in her own work, the very act of coercing bodies into docility that Foucault details is arguably no different from coercing bodies into a social idea of heteronormativity. This particular Foucaultian work does not explicitly address gender or sexuality, and these notions are only a latent idea that are prescient of his later work in *The History of Sexuality*. However, Foucault’s attention to the manipulability of the body contributes to the discussion as it proposes that although the body is entirely constructed by strict social regulations, it is nevertheless changeable. Foucault portrays the regulatory powers that result in the coerced social construction of subjects as forced and reiterative practices that privilege their continued mimicry; however, his emphasis on the manipulable body – as opposed to its concluded construction – exposes the pliability of the body.

Foucault begins his chapter “Docile Bodies” with the idealized image of the already formed and docile soldier, one “who could be recognized from afar; [as] he bore certain signs.”⁵² Foucault states that this recognizable soldier is only possible if he has a “body that [has been] manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful and increases its forces.”⁵³ In order for the recognizable soldier to manifest, his body must be “something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body.”⁵⁴ Throughout the text, Foucault explicates the theory and praxis behind the making of these bodies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,

⁵¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), 136.

⁵² *Ibid*, 135.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 136.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 135.

noting that “[the] classical age discovered the body as object and target of power.”⁵⁵ Social intelligibility demanded that the body be forcibly shaped into an intelligible and *recognizable body* that would then become an object of power. Although Foucault outlines the pliable state of the body, he argues that it was not the individual who constructed this intelligibility or who defined the recognizable body, as the individual was also the target of a power greater than itself.

Foucault shows that the body was a means of social power through its very manipulation, and this manipulation was an effect of the procreative, juridical, and societal needs, or perhaps, *desire*, for domination and control. “A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved,” and what made this crucial in “the classical age,” according to Foucault, was ostensibly for a greater social good – to produce and survive as a society.⁵⁶ However, what was perhaps more important than the production and survival of the society as a result of this schema was the complete preoccupation of the individual in his or her services to the state. The complete preoccupation of the individual was a type of social “insurance”: the individual obtained a status, so long as the individual fully committed to its part. The body was not allowed to engage in other activities during a nonexistent free time. In this sense, the preoccupation of the individual was critical to the social fabric of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as it frustrated the development of resistance, criminality, and non-normative beings or identities in order to protect the society from the reiteration of those *undesirable* practices. The body that was kept busy was not able to challenge the social order to bring another order into being.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 136.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

To relate Foucault's notion of the manipulable body in "Docile Bodies" (and throughout *Discipline and Punish*) to the idea of gender construction, I must address the notion of repetition and practice and how Foucault describes these processes playing out, so to speak. To create the recognizable soldier, Foucault describes that this had to be done through the repetition of certain tasks. The tasks began small and simple, and they were typically first modeled by an instructor. The task would be incessantly repeated until it was finally perfected, at which point another task would be introduced that would be repeated until perfected before a new task could be introduced, and so on. The key to complete control rested in the rigorous discipline of the details; nothing could be out of line if the soldier-in-training was to materialize into the recognizable soldier. Hence, it was not only through the repetition and perfection of certain acts that allowed the recognizable soldier to materialize, but also through the reiteration of those values that were inscribed onto the repeated acts that brought about complete docility, and finally, his being.

The rigorous discipline of the details meant that the requirements of the position and the values associated with it had to permeate every aspect of the soldier's existence; the recognizable soldier could not simply play the part, but had to become the part. Earlier in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault states that "[the] soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body."⁵⁷ Contrary to the approach that some feminists and post-structuralists have taken, that is, the body as biologically imprisoning, Foucault does not believe that there is an "inner self" that has the ability to transcend the constraints imposed upon it because *the body itself creates its own interiority* based on the "methods of punishment,

⁵⁷ Ibid, 30.

supervision and constraint” that have already been imposed on the body socially.⁵⁸ In other words, Foucault suggests that the external regulations that have created the body likewise creates the body’s “soul” – or inner self – as the subject then creates its interiority according to the regulations that have materialized its external body. Hence, prohibitions and laws shape the body, and the body shapes the soul based on those prohibitions and laws it submits itself to, which in turn, becomes the entity that regulates the body’s actions, thereby becoming the body’s very own prison.

In her paper “Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions,” Butler argues that “*Discipline and Punish* can be read as Foucault’s effort to reconceive Nietzsche’s doctrine of internalization as a language of inscription.”⁵⁹ According to Butler’s reading of *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault attempts this re-conception of Nietzsche because he does not believe that the individual has an interiority that can be detached from the juridical law that regulates it, but does believe that the juridical law can inscribe values within the individual; it is not the psyche that constructs the body, but the socially-trained body that constructs the psyche. Butler argues that the effect of the prohibitive law is “not [that it is] literally internalized, but incorporated *on* bodies; there the law is manifest as a sign of the essence of their selves, the meaning of their soul, their conscience, the law of their desire.”⁶⁰ In other words, the body Foucault describes is merely an automaton, awaiting to be programmed by the engineers that built it. For Foucault, everything that creates the body, and thereby, the “soul,” is external to the body. The body is

⁵⁸ Ibid, 29.

⁵⁹ Judith Butler, “Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 86, no. 11 (1989): 605.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

constructed by regulatory powers from the outside-in rather than through self-construction from the inside-out, and in this sense, the Foucaultian subject is completely devoid of agency.

According to Foucault's theory, the very status of the subject is put into question. Indeed, Foucault does not portray the subject as an agent, but he depicts the subject as an object of the prohibitive law and the other external forces that create it. Although Foucault describes the metamorphic possibilities of the body, his conclusion that the body is constructed from the outside-in reveals that his theory is based on the notion of deterministic constructivism. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler warns against a "constructivism [that] is reduced to determinism and implies the evacuation or displacement of human agency," as she believes that the subject does have some amount of agency within its own social construction.⁶¹ Rather than subscribing to Foucault's ideas about the impotent subject, Butler claims that subjects do have agency because they are capable of reinterpretation, re-conceptualization, and re-signification, and that this linguistic agency enables subjects to displace the sedimentation of heteronormativity and phallogocentrism. Whereas Foucault believes that the body and "soul" have already been utterly engrossed by the law – which makes reinterpretation unfathomable – Butler challenges Foucault's supposition by calling attention to the ways in which *subjects create social intelligibility and the regulatory powers of society through the constant reiteration and recirculation of language*.

In order to justify Foucault's presence in this explication, it is important to note that the law Foucault analyzes in *Discipline and Punish* is not actually the laws of the seventeenth and

⁶¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), xviii.

eighteenth centuries; rather, Foucault claims that he is “writing the history of the present.”⁶² In this sense, Foucault’s exposition about the history of the prison is not simply about the birth of the literal prison in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it is also about *the birth of deeply rooted ideological and juridical structures that presently dictate the making of the body*. In this way, Foucault’s analysis about the construction of the body as outlined in *Discipline and Punish* is completely relevant to the discussion on gender construction, and perhaps, even more apt to it for its emphasis on imprisonment. As previously mentioned, the idea of imprisonment – or the body as biologically imprisoning – is a theme that can be traced throughout the field of gender studies. Indeed, the theme has increased in popularity over the years and is no longer limited to individuals who identify as transgender and find the body to be biologically imprisoning, as feminists and masculinists alike have also taken up the idea that sex and/or gender is imprisoning.⁶³

However, Foucault’s theory about the imprisonment of the body in *Discipline and Punish* is not about the imprisonment of gender. Rather, Foucault argues that the soul imprisons the body as a result of the soul’s subjection to the body, which mirrors the body’s subjection to the prohibitions, taboos, and juridical structures of culture and society. Essentially, Foucault believes that subjects become *self-imprisoned*, as subjects inscribe the coercions that the regulatory laws have imposed on them within themselves. Although Foucault’s rendition of the making-of-the-body through the repetition of acts and the reiteration of values is what creates the social

⁶² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), 31.

⁶³ The idea about the “imprisonment of gender” has been more popular in feminist literature, criticism, and theory; however, Michael Kimmel’s “Masculinity as Homophobia” can be read as a masculinist perspective on the imprisonment of the masculine gender/position.

sedimentation that Butler describes, his theory reinstates the idea that the body is nothing more than a social construct. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault invites his audience to free “The [imprisoned] man described for us,” but he seems to believe that all attempts to do so would be in vain as the man “is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself.”⁶⁴

How, then, might this body that Foucault describes be liberated? In order to free the subject from its own self-incarceration, it is necessary to reformulate Foucault’s analysis about the body-as-complete-construction and the regulatory ideal of sex by examining the ways in which the subject’s inner self exceeds its socially-coerced construction and by exposing the body as always already transgendered. Because transgendered subjects transcend the social prescriptions imposed on them, they are not oppressed by the regulatory powers of society. In order to understand how the inner self exceeds its social construction and how the body is already transgendered, it is imperative that the body is not reduced to its external appearance by an essentialist or constructivist perspective, but that the materiality of the signifiers it employs, and hence, the materiality of its *inner life*, is taken into consideration. In this sense, Foucault’s denial of the inner self is fallacious, as the act of inscription is not possible without some amount of internalization, resistance, or subversion. The body is not a formless lump of clay that waits for the juridical potter to shape it into something that will signify. What needs to be considered is the part the subject plays in its own construction.

⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), 30.

Transgendering the body demands that the entire materiality of the individual, body and self, is examined; yet the starting point is nevertheless Foucault's notion of the regulatory ideal – the assignment of a sex to all bodies upon entering the world, and oftentimes before through the practice of sexing fetuses with sonograms. However, the assignment of a sex is a construction of the subject, and for that matter, it is the earliest construction in an individual's life, which continues to prescribe other assignments to the body. Butler addresses the issues that stem from this primary construction, but warns her imagined critic not to accuse her of somatophobia for questioning the necessity of the practice, as she “will admit that there are, minimally, sexually differentiated parts, activities, capacities, hormonal and chromosomal differences that can be conceded without reference to ‘construction;’” however, this concession makes her anxious as the materiality of the signifier nevertheless illustrates “that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body.”⁶⁵ As mentioned in the introduction, the assignment of a sex to an individual is a construction that is citing the practice of a larger set of constructions; it is the reiteration of naturalized matter that is reified with every repetition or citation. In this way, the regulatory ideal is part of a larger set of regulatory practices, and it continuously works at grounding individuals in their sex.

Like Foucault, rather than believe that sex functions as a static norm, Butler discerns it as taking “part of a regulatory practice.”⁶⁶ However, for Butler, the regulatory ideal of sex does not only appear to be part of a larger regulatory practice, but a practice in which individuals have collectively ‘chosen’ to interpellate themselves. ‘Chosen’ is not exactly the right word here –

⁶⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of “sex”* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), xix.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, xi.

hence the quotations – because even though the term ‘practice’ suggests that there is an agency associated with the ‘decision’ to take up this practice, it is, nevertheless, a *highly regulated practice* that is constantly compelled, *and compelled by its own practice*. Butler states that

... “sex” is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, “sex” is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize “sex” and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms.⁶⁷

Although sex is “forcibly materialized through time,” Butler claims that the materialization of sex can fail to take place – which allows for the category of sex to be re-signified – when the failure to reiterate the regulatory ideal occurs.⁶⁸ Because Butler encourages subjects that have been delegated to the feminine position and those that have been relegated to abjection to take up the lesbian phallus in order to disrupt the masculinist signifying chain, Butler appears to believe that the individual does have an agency or freedom to ‘choose’ how it reiterates and re-signifies received norms, distinguishing herself radically from Foucault. Although Butler states that the materialization of sex sometimes fails to take place, she also suggests that the failure to reiterate the norm of sex has the potential to fall outside the realm of social intelligibility, as the ideality of the regulatory ideal becomes its own compelling force. Although Butler believes that the subject’s agency allows it to choose how it reiterates and re-signifies received norms, she also

⁶⁷ Ibid, xii.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

suggests that the subject's ability to execute freedom in its 'choice' of gender is nevertheless limited.

Hence, the regulatory practice of prescribed sex is problematic, *as it impels the genesis of a string of assignments* that will be prescribed to an individual before that individual can even develop an understanding of or resistance to those prescriptions. Although problematic, the regulatory ideal is also requisite because it forcibly compels itself through time based on its material reality and *sedimented intelligibility*. In this sense, the regulatory ideal of sex cannot be altogether denied, nor can it be altered on the basis of a singular discursive effect *as it has become its own self-propelling catalyst*.

Rather than accept an essentialist, determinist, or constructivist approach that denies an interiority to the individual it is trying to prescribe or signify in this or that way, the regulatory ideal should be understood as a *prerequisite* to sexual differentiation, gender construction, and identity or subject formation. Because the painstaking visibility of sex cannot be denied, it is, ostensibly, one way in which subjects become gendered. However, to consider the ways in which the body is already transgendered, it is necessary to move away from Foucault's seemingly deterministic constructivism, regardless of how fictitious he takes social constructions to be. The reality of the body should not be understood as a coerced construction that concludes, but as a conglomerated and an agglomerating being.

Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist proposition of transcendentalism in *The Second Sex* challenges the passively-constructed body that Foucault describes. Her theory about the subject's desire for transcendence seems to be her attempt to understand the subject's agency and the

already transgendered body. Her famous declaration that “[one] is not born, but rather becomes, woman,” resonates with the notion that gender identity is distinct from anatomy, as it proposes that the subject has some amount of agency in the becoming of its gender.⁶⁹ Butler observes that de Beauvoir’s declaration suggests “that *woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification.”⁷⁰ Because de Beauvoir’s theory suggests that the becoming of subjects is “an ongoing discursive practice,” not only does she propose that subjects transcend their gender, but she also postulates that in their desire for transcendence, subjects become capable of self-construction.⁷¹

Indeed, de Beauvoir’s emphasis on the body’s ability to transcend its prescribed gender indicates that it is not that gender is passively inscribed on the body, but that subject on which a gender is prescribed nevertheless has some sort of agency to choose its gender – that, despite the shackles that the regulatory ideal places on the individual, there is an aspect of the subject that somehow surfaces through a self-reflexive process. However, de Beauvoir undoubtedly problematizes her own text, as she invariably suggests that the choice one has in choosing a gender is to become its *gender-as-sex*, but at the same time, that that one cannot be oppressed by its *gender-as-sex*. In this sense, de Beauvoir’s text echoes Lacan’s theories about the construction of gender-as-sex, as she simultaneously promotes an essentialist and constructivist approach to gender. Although de Beauvoir refutes a philosophy that altogether limits the body to its strictly

⁶⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2011), 283.

⁷⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), 45.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

biological features, she cannot imagine a gender constructed outside of sexual differentiation, as Butler has observed that for de Beauvoir, “[lived] or experienced ‘sex’ is always already gendered.”⁷² de Beauvoir does not acknowledge that her ideas about gender identity are a combination of essentialist and constructivist philosophies, but these notions are nevertheless present in her text as it is *women* that she examines in various social positions who are forever in a state of *becoming women*.

It should be noted that de Beauvoir’s examination of ‘women becoming women’ was not meant to reinstate Freud’s essentialist notions about femininity. On the contrary, de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* was her attempt to dispel essentialist philosophies by depicting an incomprehensible proliferation of the individualized experiences of women. de Beauvoir necessarily grouped together the female sex in order to challenge the prescriptive ideals of ‘woman’ and ‘femininity’ that Freudian psychoanalysis attempted to prove scientifically. However, as Foucault notes in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*: “the notion of ‘sex’ [makes] it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures.”⁷³ In this sense, Simone de Beauvoir’s decision to depict women becoming women has two influences: 1.) Freudian psychoanalysis compelled her to challenge its theories about the female sex and femininity; and, 2.) because de Beauvoir was an early interlocutor in the discussion about gender identity, there was not yet an established discourse to borrow from that would allow her to challenge the normative concepts of gender.

⁷² Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," *Yale French Studies*, no. 72 (1986): 39.

⁷³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1990), 154.

Hence, Simone de Beauvoir's decision to accept the "artificial unity" of the regulatory ideal should not be understood as her resolution to adopt a biology-is-destiny philosophy.⁷⁴ de Beauvoir reduced her interpretation of gender to male/female and masculine/feminine because she lacked the language to pioneer concepts that fell outside of the gender dichotomy *and* because she wanted to stress how the *choice of gender* is limited from the start by the options from which there are to choose. Indeed, Foucault states that the regulatory ideal "enable[s] one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle."⁷⁵ However, rather than accept the regulatory ideal as a causal principle that leads to the natural assumption of gender-as-sex, de Beauvoir accepts the regulatory ideal as a causal principle that encourages subjects to assume the restrictive ideals of masculinity and femininity. For de Beauvoir, the choice of a gender must operate within the existing genders of the culture, and in this sense, de Beauvoir's text resonates with the Foucaultian notions of the regulatory ideal and socioideological coercion.

Rather than holding these seemingly essentialist and constructivist philosophies in opposition, de Beauvoir expresses these ideas about the body in conjunction with one another. In this sense, de Beauvoir implies that one cannot escape the body – it is the medium that anchors the existent to the social world. Because of her existentialist beliefs, de Beauvoir cannot deny the materiality of the body and the historico-cultural implications it carries. However, what distinguishes de Beauvoir's ideas from traditional conceptions of essentialism and constructivism is that she does not deny the existence of the individual's inner identity, as she believes that there is an *inner self* that is forever attempting to transcend its body and its prescribed gender.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Contrary to reconstructing gender as sex in the way that Lacan does, de Beauvoir's ideas about the construction of gender-as-sex more closely resemble Foucault's theories about the coerced construction of subjects, as she implies that it is through the ongoing *practice* of gender that constantly reconstructs gender as opposed to the singular act of signification. Like the imprisoned subject Foucault describes, the de Beauvoirian subject cannot escape *its sexed body*. However, her belief in the individual's *potential*, which is made possible through the individual's inner self or identity, differs from Lacan's and Foucault's philosophies that promote construction-as-prescription, as her theory indicates that subjects *do not always assume their gender-as-sex due to the various gender practices that subjects adopt in their attempt to transcend their social identities*.

It is this notion that incites de Beauvoir's critique of Freud's theories about sexual differentiation and libidinal development. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir reexamines Freud's work regarding frigidity and hysteria in women, and she finds Freud's theories inchoate. Moreover, de Beauvoir accuses Freud of myopia for being too historically rooted in the social fabric of his time when she states:

As Merleau-Ponty very justly puts it, man is not a natural species; he is a historical idea. Woman is not a completed reality, but rather a becoming, and it is in her becoming that she should be compared with men; that is to say, her *possibilities* should be defined: what skews the issues so much is that she is being reduced to what she was, to what she is today, while the question concerns her capacities; the fact is that her capacities manifest themselves clearly only when

they have been realized; but the fact is also that when one considers a being who is transcendence and surpassing, it is never possible to close the books.⁷⁶

Because Freud ‘closed the books’ on his female patients when he reduced them to their social image and sex, de Beauvoir claims that Freud refused to see that his female patients were denied the opportunity to transcend the social obligations expected of them. de Beauvoir argues that Freud’s female patients developed hysteria or frigidity *because they were denied opportunities*, and that the hysteria or frigidity they developed was not a natural consequence of their sex. She asserts that Freud’s female patients had no opportunity to express their potential in a productive manner, whereby they could then negotiate or resist the social prescriptions imposed on them with the internal promise that otherwise lay dormant. In this sense, de Beauvoir suggests that the negotiation of a split identity – that of the inner and the social – is essential in order to function in the realm of human reality. Moreover, de Beauvoir contends that one cannot be reduced to his or her sex or assigned gender, as she believes that social prescriptions lead to inhibition.

Although *The Second Sex* ostensibly resonates with essentialist and constructivist ideals, de Beauvoir’s conceptions about the formation of gender identity is largely novel because she does not promote a gender-as-sex or construction-as-prescription philosophy. Instead, de Beauvoir proposes that because the subject cannot escape its sexed body and the acculturation that it inevitably gives rise to, anatomical sex becomes formative of the subject in some capacity. Because de Beauvoir depicts the subject as a never-ending becoming, the anatomical sex that gives rise to a part of the subject’s construction is not portrayed as determining the subject’s final

⁷⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2011), 45-6.

construction. Butler discusses de Beauvoir's innovative theory in her paper "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*":

... Simone de Beauvoir's account of 'becoming' a gender reconciles the internal ambiguity of gender as both 'project' and 'construct'. When 'becoming' a gender is understood to be both choice and acculturation, then the usually oppositional relation between these terms is undermined. In keeping "become" ambiguous, Beauvoir formulates gender as a corporeal locus of cultural possibilities both received and innovated. Her theory of gender, then, entails a reinterpretation of the existential doctrine of choice whereby 'choosing' a gender is understood as the embodiment of possibilities within a network of deeply entrenched cultural norms.⁷⁷

By undermining the "oppositional relation" between "choice and acculturation," Butler argues that de Beauvoir's theory about gender construction opens up new "cultural possibilities" for the body, and perhaps, a path in which the subject can construct itself – becoming transgendered in new and proliferative ways.⁷⁸ To become a gender, according to de Beauvoir's theory of gender formation, demands that the individual is first a recipient of those "deeply entrenched cultural norms," after which the individual then has a "choice" to enact or perform its gender.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," *Yale French Studies*, no. 72 (1986): 37.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

While Butler appreciates the ambiguity of “gender” and “becoming” that de Beauvoir introduces, she initially seems troubled by de Beauvoir’s formulation of “choice,” “becoming,” and “gender,” as she thinks it pointless, or perhaps disheartening, that the becoming to which de Beauvoir refers is a becoming of gender-as-sex. At the same time, Butler discerns echoes from the “Cartesian ghost” here, which she accredits to Jean-Paul Sartre for the influence he likely had on de Beauvoir’s work. The subtext of Cartesianism unsettles Butler as “it postulates a choosing agent prior to its chosen gender... an egological structure which lives and thrives prior to language and cultural life.”⁸⁰ Although Butler suggests that psychic life starts to develop prior to a full immersion in language as a result of the infant’s prediscursive and material sputterings in the imaginary stage, she notes that Cartesianism opposes contemporary theories of language and identity construction as contemporary theories suggest that there cannot be a “choosing agent” prior to language. How, then, can Butler be appeased?

In detecting a Sartrean theme, Butler revisits *Being and Nothingness* and analyzes Sartre’s declarations “I am my body” and “My body is a *point of departure* which I *am* and which at the same time I surpass.”⁸¹ In these formulations, Butler traces a “duality of consciousness,” in that Sartre implies that “the body is intrinsic to human reality” and also that “the disembodied or transcendent feature of personal identity [is] paradoxically, yet essentially, related to embodiment.”⁸² Sartre’s belief that the human condition necessitates that there is a forever striving-for-transcendence, which, also by necessity, is nevertheless anchored to the social world,

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 329.

⁸² Judith Butler, “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 72 (1986): 38.

indicates that the body grounds consciousness, and through that establishment, becomes the mind's access to the world. However, the consciousness of the individual who inhabits that body is, through its very consciousness, simultaneously always beyond its own body, and thereby is not identical to its body. In this complex theory, Sartre appears to view the body as the house of two consciousnesses: one is connected to the body and the social domain, while the other is always beyond the body and the social domain.

The theory Sartre puts forth in *Being and Nothingness* does not strictly suggest that there is a consciousness prior to the body (Cartesianism), but that due to a *consciousness of the body* (which is only possible because of the body's existence in the social domain), a second consciousness is developed that is always trying to transcend its body, and arguably the consciousness of its body. In this sense, the body and mind Sartre describes represents a split consciousness and not a mind-body dualism; although one consciousness is always beyond itself and is not identical to the consciousness that is fixed to the social world, the two consciousnesses are nevertheless accessible to one another. Butler takes Sartre's theory about the body that is always trying to surpass itself as a "mode of becoming":

The body is not a static phenomenon, but a mode of intentionality, a directional force and mode of desire. As a condition of access to the world, the body is a being comported beyond itself, sustaining a necessary reference to the world, and thus, never a self-identical natural entity.⁸³

⁸³ Ibid.

In this sense, the consciousness that is beyond-the-body – what Butler takes to be the body’s ‘mode of becoming’ and what Sartre describes as “the disembodied personal identity that is tied to embodiment” – is never free from the consciousness of its body and the social world, but rather, should be seen as the space in which possible and impossible phantasmic musings to transcend reality occur.⁸⁴

Butler notes that de Beauvoir’s re-appropriation of Sartre is a more subdued version of his theory and does not strictly deal with the notions of “being ‘in’ and ‘beyond’ the body,” as de Beauvoir believes that “one is one’s body from the start, and only thereafter becomes one’s gender.”⁸⁵ Although the individual that de Beauvoir describes can ‘choose’ its gender, it cannot do so from a disembodied place beyond the body, as “the body is the instrument of our hold on the world,” and thereby already culturally constructed by normative gender categories.⁸⁶ For de Beauvoir, the ‘part’ of the individual that can be identified as ‘personal identity’ is never a disembodied entity, but rather, is always connected to its social embodiment. Hence, de Beauvoir’s re-appropriation of Sartre’s split consciousness slightly differs from his theory, as she believes that one consciousness is *anchored* by the body in the social domain, while the other is *connected* to the body and the social domain. In other words, the inner identity, or ‘agency,’ that de Beauvoir describes can never be completely free from its body and its social identity, as its very genesis is dependent on them. It has already been the recipient of cultural norms that have

⁸⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 329.

⁸⁵ Judith Butler, “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 72 (1986): 39.

⁸⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2011), 44.

shaped its understanding of the world. de Beauvoir's notion of 'choice,' then, should be understood as the ability to enact one's inner identity within the terms and limits of one's socially constructed-identity.

Borrowing still from Sartrean philosophy in order to provide a lens in which to interpret de Beauvoir's theory, Butler introduces Sartre's notion of "quasi knowledge" and reformulates it as "prereflective choice."⁸⁷ Butler defines prereflective choice as "[not] wholly conscious, but nevertheless accessible to consciousness, it is the kind of choice we make and only later realize we have made."⁸⁸ Butler understands de Beauvoir's tricky use of the word 'choice' in the construction of gender to indicate *prereflective choice*, as the 'choice' of gender is problematized by the fact that the body is already completely 'mired' in gender as a result of its sexed status. According to this interpretation, the acculturation and the development of the social identity take place prior to the development of an inner identity that may or may not be more individualistic than the gendered options that already exist in the culture. Indeed, when de Beauvoir states that "the world appears different to us depending on how it is grasped," she implies that the 'grasping' must occur prior to the development of a differentiated perception.⁸⁹ Because de Beauvoir cannot deny the materiality of the body and the cultural implications of the body, the body seems to first surface as a construction that has been shaped by the culture, and it is only later when the individual may reflect on or gain insight to the gendered choices it has made and the gendered choices it makes.

⁸⁷ Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," *Yale French Studies*, no. 72 (1986): 40.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2011), 44.

Being only partially conscious of the ‘choice’ of gender, especially during the formative years, taking on a gender is an ongoing assignment of receiving gender norms, interpreting them, and reenacting them, and it is only later when “becoming a gender” is an ongoing and “tacit project to renew one’s cultural history in one’s own terms.”⁹⁰ Butler interprets de Beauvoir’s construction of gender as having to undergo two different forms of embodiment: first, the construction of gender is created by the prescriptions that society places on the individual based on sex, which the individual does not passively accept, but pre-reflectively chooses to accept as those prescriptions are both readily identifiable, and ostensibly, privileged forms of embodiment; second, the individual, now deeply acculturated, nevertheless discerns a disconnect from its social identity, as, though it always feels connected to it, it simultaneously feels that it cannot be reduced to the social version of itself as a result of the various experiences it has had to negotiate, which allows the second consciousness to form and resurface as an embodiment. Indeed, Butler argues that de Beauvoir’s theory indicates a “movement from sex to gender... a move from one kind of embodiment to another.”⁹¹ In other words, de Beauvoir’s theory suggests a movement from the coerced construction of the social identity to the self-construction of the inner identity, and it is this move that allows de Beauvoir’s notion of the body as “situation” to materialize.⁹²

Because de Beauvoir believes that transcendence is corporeally and culturally limited, her idea of the ‘body as situation’ implies that the becoming, and perhaps the subversion, of gender

⁹⁰ Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," *Yale French Studies*, no. 72 (1986): 40.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2011), 46.

must operate within the culturally-constructed terms of gender. However, in always situating the body in the social domain of normative genders, de Beauvoir nevertheless suggests that the body is also our 'instrument' in the world and that there are numerous ways in which to play it. In claiming that "the body is not a *thing*, it is a situation: it is the grasp on the world and the outline for our projects,"⁹³ de Beauvoir illustrates that the body is neither always its gender-as-sex nor its construction-as-prescription, but an existent in "a *field of interpretive possibilities*, the locus of a dialectical process of interpreting anew a historical set of interpretations which have become imprinted in the flesh."⁹⁴ In treating the regulatory ideal of sex as a prerequisite to gender, the social identity, and the inner identity, de Beauvoir moves the discussion away from deterministic philosophies on the body and opens it up to a consideration of how negotiation, choice, reinterpretation, and self-construction operate in the individual. Her theory brings to light the development of the subject's differentiated perception, which resurfaces on the individual as a physical embodiment that the individual must constantly negotiate with its social identity. In this sense, the becoming of gender and identity can never end, as the individual is always trying to surpass itself, but is necessarily limited by the knowledge of its own cultural and corporeal constructions.

Although the predecessor to both Foucault and Butler, de Beauvoir finds a compromise to their theories on inscription as imprisonment and the materiality of the signifier as the ability to re-conceptualize socially-constructed norms. For de Beauvoir, *the regulatory ideal is inscribed on and within the body*, and in many ways, imprisons the body, as the social identity is

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," *Yale French Studies*, no. 72 (1986): 45.

constructed from the start, which likewise constructs the inner identity as it is always connected to it. Although de Beauvoir likens the inner identity to potential transcendence, it is simultaneously limited by the social identity's acculturation. However, de Beauvoir suggests that the subject is not devoid of agency as it always desires to transcend its social prescriptions. In this sense, the subject, who is always desiring to transcend its social identity, proliferates normative gender categories in an attempt to realize its becoming. Hence, the inscription to which de Beauvoir refers differs from Foucault's notion of inscription, as the individual is *not* already in itself "the effect of a subjection much more profound than [itself]," but becomes completely free from subjection because of its ever-developing self-awareness.⁹⁵

In this way, de Beauvoir shows how the self-construction of the subject is a slow and tedious process, as the subject must always account for the palimpsestic historicity of the regulatory powers that have influenced the construction of its social identity. Because the subject always desires to transcend its social prescription, it ceaselessly attempts to rewrite itself and its history in its own terms. Hence, the nature of the subject's desire for transcendence suggests that – in the subject's attempt to rewrite its existence in its own terms – it cites a *number* of already existing genders throughout its life in order to realize its own unique and individualistic becoming.

Because the subject has the ability to reinterpret the received norms of *masculinity and femininity* by means of its inner identity, and because it has the ability to re-signify those norms in new ways via its social identity, the subject never only cites one gender, but is always citing

⁹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), 30.

many genders. In this sense, the subject is constantly constructing itself due to its desire for transcendence, and this calls attention to the fluidity of gender and reveals the subject's transgendered status. However, because there is privilege associated with the construction-as-prescription of gender-as-sex, the subject's inner and social identities are compelled to exist in a constant state of negotiation. Hence, through the social identity's coerced construction, the subject is at risk of becoming its own jailer, but through the inner identity's desire for transcendence, the subject can become its own abolitionist. Although the subject is always already transgendered due to its desire for transcendence, the subject's social identity always risks subjecting itself to a privileged form of existence in order to remain culturally intelligible. However, the subject is simultaneously capable of exempting itself from the coerced construction of its social identity due to the perseverance of the subject's inner identity and its differentiated perception.

Rather than subscribing to a philosophy that promotes deterministic constructivism, Simone de Beauvoir highlights how the body is never its construction-as-prescription or its gender-as-sex, but a subject that is navigating and negotiating the social prescriptions that are imposed on it with the individuality of its inner life. In this sense, de Beauvoir's theory illustrates how subjects are capable of altering the materiality of themselves and of the world. Although the subject's ability to transcend its social prescriptions is limited by the material reality of its sexed body, de Beauvoir nevertheless shows that the subject is not entirely cast by the coerced constructions of the culture or by the material reality of its sex, but that it is the choosing and deciding agent of its own volition as it cites various genders throughout its life in order to actualize its becoming.

Chapter Two

The Dialectic of Naturalization as Formative of the “i” as Revealed by the Materiality of the Signifier

Thus, the shattering of the *Innenwelt* to *Umwelt* circle gives rise to an inexhaustible squaring of the ego's audits. – Jacques Lacan “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience”

My suggestion is that the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time. From a feminist point of view, one might try to reconcile the gendered body as the legacy of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence or fact, whether natural, cultural, or linguistic. – Judith Butler “Performance Acts and Gender Constitution”

The subject is, as a result, never coherent and never self-identical precisely because it is founded and, indeed, continually refounded, through a set of defining foreclosures and repressions that constitute the discontinuity and incompleteness of the subject. – Judith Butler *Bodies that Matter*

By re-appropriating the structure of Jacques Lacan’s famous title, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” I undoubtedly open up this section to ridicule. Some may even refer to it as a *vain mimicry*. Yet, the risk is worthwhile, as Lacan’s theory about the mirror stage as being formative of the “I” has had a significant impact on the formation of this chapter. Indeed, Lacan’s theory about how the infant’s identification with its *imago* – which it takes as a *gestalt* – causes its specular *I* to form (and later, its social *I*) has been essential to my thoughts about how the dialectic of naturalization becomes formative of the *i* – on which I will elaborate in this section.

Lacan’s presumptions about the development of psychic life in infants, which is spurred by the infant’s realization of its own fragmentation, brings to light his later theory in “The Signification of the Phallus,” in which he suggests that the subject navigates between the imaginary and symbolic domains throughout its life. The prediscursive psychic life that Lacan describes, which is brought about when the infant first realizes that the *imago* it takes to be itself

is a more perfect version of itself for the “wholeness” it represents and for which it will forever strive to achieve, demonstrates that the specular *I*, to some extent, exemplifies an essential self that is free from “the dialectic of identification with the other.”⁹⁶ In stretching his theories into the realm of “existential psychoanalysis” that he warns us against – his ideas as presented in “The Mirror Stage” nevertheless seem to resonate with Simone de Beauvoir’s notions about the subject’s split identity and the *choosing agency* of its becoming.⁹⁷

While Lacan does not subscribe to the existentialist propositions that suggest that there is an “absolute subject,” and for that matter, believes that agency and choice are illusory as desire is always mediated by the other, he nevertheless toys with the idea of the *I*’s “mental permanence” when he suggests that the subject is constantly having to negotiate its discordance between its *I* and reality.⁹⁸ Although the language Lacan employs in his theory about the “Mirror Stage” is reminiscent of Simone de Beauvoir’s language in *The Second Sex* when he states that the subject “only asymptotically approach[es]” its own “becoming,” Lacan’s theory predates de Beauvoir’s thesis on the subject’s becoming and actually influenced the development of her work.⁹⁹ In spite of Lacan’s cautions against adopting an “existential psychoanalysis,” which appears to be specifically directed at the philosophy proposed by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, Lacan’s influence on de Beauvoir’s work demonstrates how he nevertheless furthered existential thought.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), 76.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

By taking the influence Lacanian psychoanalysis had on de Beauvoirian existentialism into consideration, Lacan's theory about the mirror stage and the *I*'s mental permanence not only promotes notions of existential psychoanalysis (despite his warnings), but his theory about the ongoing negotiation between the imaginary and the symbolic and the *I* and reality is also reminiscent of dialectical materialism. Indeed, Lacan's doctrine indicates that there is an ongoing tension between the external construction of the subject (via signification) and the mental permanence of the *I* in the subject. Because dialectical materialism postulates that the material world is interpretable, Lacan's theory about the mental permanence of the subject's specular *I* invokes the idea that matter, language, and that which is socially constructed are interpretable and evolutive because of the very permanence of the *I*. Building from Lacan's and de Beauvoir's work, Judith Butler further develops this idea of dialectical materialism that Lacan and de Beauvoir touch upon through her theory about the materiality of the signifier.

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler explains how the signifier is material because the concept of the sign becomes tied to the signifier through the signified. Although Butler does not state that her theory belongs to the tradition of dialectical materialism, Butler's supposition that materiality and language become malleable through the very materiality of the signifier due to the signified's interpretability advances the idea that language, matter, and thought evolve through the subject's interpretations and significations. Dialectical materialism, which originally derived from the Hegelian Dialectic – an interpretative method – proposes that the material conditions of the physical world are interpretable and thereby changeable. In this way, Butler's proposition that the materiality of the signifier allows subjects to reinterpret and re-signify socially-constructed concepts aligns with the doctrine of dialectical materialism. Moreover, Butler's reinterpretation

of Lacan's theory about the psychic development of infants via Julia Kristeva's theories will provide a lens to the ways in which de Beauvoir's existentialist interpretation of Lacan's mirror stage also falls within the tradition of dialectical materialism.

However, if what is still at question is *how* the subject that de Beauvoir describes manages to construct itself despite the coerced constructions imposed on it externally, then it is necessary to reexamine Lacan's theory about the mirror stage that influenced de Beauvoir's ideas about the becoming of the subject. In spite of Lacan's insistence that the specular *I* must be replaced with the social *I* once the subject comes into language, he nevertheless makes a case for the ongoing agency of the subject by theorizing the *I*'s mental permanence. The negotiation between the *I* and reality, then, becomes the incessant project of the subject's becoming, wherein the subject is coerced to assume a version of itself that is constructed in the social domain, but which it can only assume after it has interpreted the received norms from society.

As a result, the subject can only ever approximate the constructions imposed on it socially, as its interpretations do not always align with the social norms that it has received, for which the subject, as a self-conscious being, is well aware. Lacan states that this self-awareness produces an insecurity in the subject and becomes a "paranoiac knowledge," which causes the subject to believe that everything external to it constitutes a threat.¹⁰¹ Hence, Butler's theory about the materiality of the signifier and Kristeva's theory about the role abjection plays in the psychic development of subjects will demonstrate how the coerced construction of subjects and the reiteration of heteronormative ideals are the effects of the dialectic of naturalization. In other

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 76.

words, Lacan's, de Beauvoir's, Kristeva's, and Butler's theories will elucidate the dialectic of naturalization, as their theories establish a framework for understanding the constraints between the mutability and immutability of social intelligibility. Hence, the dialectic of naturalization singles out the limitations imposed on the mutability of social intelligibility, as it depicts how subjects constantly encounter reifications or disputations from the social mirror based on the validity of subjects' reinterpretations and re-significations.¹⁰² In this sense, the social mirror either reifies or disputes the subject's interpretations and re-significations of received social norms depending on how close the subject's interpretations and re-significations come to the standard – and for that matter, the phallogocentric – understanding of those concepts.

I will explain how Lacan's mirror stage is applicable to the construction of the subject that de Beauvoir describes in the text that follows by re-appropriating the mathematical concept of the imaginary unit. The re-appropriation of the imaginary unit – also known as the number i – will serve as a metaphor to the mutable and immutable nature of the subject's becoming and of the signifier's materiality. In other words, the number i will illustrate how the social I does not replace the specular I in the dialectic of naturalization, and how the specular I – or inner identity – is limited in its ability to displace immutable concepts. Hence, the imaginary unit via its rotation through the Imaginary and Real Dimensions of the Cartesian coordinate system will metaphorically depict how the specular I and the social I are constantly re-formulating one another as the subject attempts to transcend its social construction; moreover, the subject's attempts to transcend its social construction requires that the subject compensates for its

¹⁰² The “social mirror” refers to other subjects in the social domain, and other subjects react to the signifiers used by subjects through reifications or disputations.

fragmented state via interpretation and re-formulation. As a result, the number i depicts how the subject is constantly receiving and creating additional formulations of “self,” which necessitates the subject’s never-ending becoming. Furthermore, the dialectic of naturalization as demonstrated by the rotational properties of the number i also depicts how social concepts become sedimented and naturalized – as certain social concepts prove immutable through the ongoing reification and reiteration of those concepts – which results in the stratification of social intelligibility.

However, the dialectic of naturalization is an ongoing process as the subject can only ever asymptotically approach meaning and its own becoming. This reveals that concepts that appear to be natural have only become naturalized through the somewhat rigid association between – and linguistic conventions regulating – the signifier and the signified. Because the dialectic of naturalization illustrates how the construction and sedimentation of social concepts occurs *through the subjects that create them*, it also highlights how subjects can generate new social concepts since the nature of the signifying triad is arbitrary. Although subjects are limited in their re-signifying abilities, displacing the sedimentation of the signified – and for that matter, phallogocentrism – is nevertheless possible through a collective yet proliferative reinterpretation and re-signification of those concepts. Hence, a reexamination of Lacan’s theory about the mirror stage will illustrate that the mirror stage does not actually conclude when the infant reaches eighteen months of age – as the social I does not replace the specular I since it remains to be an irreducible aspect of the subject – but that the mirror stage becomes replaced by the dialectic of naturalization, wherein the social mirror supersedes the *imago* and the specular I transforms into the subject’s inner identity.

Ferdinand de Saussure's theory about the arbitrariness between the signified and signifier – and for that matter, their mutable and immutable nature – will play a key role in this discussion. Indeed, it is when the subject adopts language that the arbitrariness between the signifier and the signified becomes apparent, as the subject can only ever approximate or peripherally understand the conceptual meaning of established signifiers through interpretation. Because of this, the subject's misinterpretation of social concepts demonstrates how the specular *I* remains an irreducible aspect of the subject as its inner identity, since it reveals that part of the subject continues to exist in the phantasmic order of its inner world. In other words, the mental permanence of the inner identity's differentiated perception is made apparent by the subject's inability to imitate the received norms of society without making those norms its own. In this sense, the subject's misinterpretations give rise to abjection, and it is abjection and the materiality of the signifier that implicate the subject within the dialectic of naturalization.

Indeed, when linguistic and social abjection surfaces, the arbitrariness between the signified and signifier becomes apparent and subjects can then reinterpret received social norms by re-conceptualizing the materiality of the signifier. By re-conceptualizing the materiality of the signifier, the signified becomes displaced and a breach between the signifier and sign manifests. In displacing the sedimentation of the signified, new concepts and values can take the place of the former signified, and in doing so, can transform the shape and meaning of the signifier and the sign.

A reexamination of Lacan's, de Beauvoir's, Kristeva's, and Butler's theories will contextualize the theory put forth about the dialectic of naturalization in the text that follows.

Because the dialectic of naturalization as demonstrated by the number *i* depends on the reifications and disputations from the social mirror, for which the subject is always incited to interpret, the subject's specular *I* and social *I* – or, its inner and social identities – exist in a constant state of tension. Within the dialectic of naturalization, the subject's desire for self-preservation is constantly at odds with the desire to be mediated by the other's desire, and this results in the subject's ongoing and conglomerating becoming, in the subject's transgendered state, and in the displacement of the signified.

The Mirror Stage and the Mental Permanence of the "I"

Although Lacan would undoubtedly disagree with the choosing agency of the subject that de Beauvoir describes, and does in fact disagree with this interpretation in his essay about the mirror stage, he nevertheless implies that there is some validity to the argument:

... the important point is that this form situates the agency known as the ego, prior to its social determination, in a fictional direction that will forever remain irreducible for any single individual or, rather, that will only asymptotically approach the subject's becoming, no matter how successful the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve, as *I*, his discordance with his own reality.¹⁰³

By equating the agency of the subject with the ego – *the force that mediates the chaos of the id* – Lacan's theory does indeed convey that the subject has an internal agency that exceeds the external construction it is coerced to assume as a result of signification. Although Lacan claims

¹⁰³ Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), 76.

that the subject's agency is continuously compelled to negotiate the discordance between itself and reality, negotiation in this sense does not detract from the subject's agency, but forces the subject to *synthesize* – and for that matter *interpret* – objective reality with its own differentiated perception.

Lacan argues that the “anticipation” of maturation invoked in the infant as a result of the infant's strong identification with its *imago*, which he refers to as a “mirage,” is a monumental moment in the subject-to-be's development.¹⁰⁴ However, one might ask here as to why Lacan believes that the infant so readily abandons the specular *I* for the social *I* the moment it comes into language. Because the infant is premature as it has not yet mastered its motor control and can only come to terms with its *imago* as a *gestalt* – that is, as a kind of transformative pattern that demonstrates to the infant the promise of the significance of itself – Lacan notes that the identificatory traversal the infant undergoes in order to posit itself as constituted rather than as constitutive “symbolizes the *I*'s mental permanence, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination.”¹⁰⁵

Hence, the status of the infant and the later subject is marked at the moment of this primary identification as what is and what can only ever be a constitutive being. The foreshadowing of this alienating destination, which materializes when the infant begins to project the *I* onto itself, and in this sense, demonstrates how the “*I*'s mental permanence” rules and is ruled by a phantasmic order, leads the infant into an “ambiguous relation” with the projects it

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

sets for itself.¹⁰⁶ Lacan notes that this “ambiguous relation” to the infant’s “projects” is brought about by the inferiority of the infant’s undeveloped motor control, and for that matter, the infant’s realization of the limitations imposed on it by its own corporeal reality.¹⁰⁷

Although the primary identification brought about by the mirror stage has symbolized and established the “I’s mental permanence,” the infant’s “ambiguous relation” to its projects suggests the impotent nature of that position. Lacan argues that the inadequacy of this narcissistic identification leads the infant into a spatial realization of “heteromorphic identifications,” wherein the “force field of desire... of the social dialectic... structures human knowledge as paranoiac,” which the infant then carries into adulthood.¹⁰⁸ Lacan describes how the innate structure of human knowledge as paranoiac leads the subject-to-be “to recognize in the spatial capture manifested by the mirror stage, the effect in man, even prior to this social dialectic, of an organic inadequacy of his natural reality.”¹⁰⁹ Although Lacan refers to a “natural reality” of early human development, he offhandedly states that this interpretation “[assumes] we can give some meaning to the term ‘nature,’” implying that what is understood to be natural is not an accurate representation of nature.¹¹⁰ Rather than digress into a discussion about the concept of “nature,” as Lacan believes that subjects become constructed linguistically, he concludes that the function of the *imago* in the mirror stage is “to establish a relationship between the organism and its reality – or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 77.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 76-7.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 78.

Rather than subscribing to the infant's *natural* inadequacy, Lacan notes that the infant's realization of its inadequacy is a result of its "*specific prematurity of birth*," which "is altered by a certain dehiscence at the very heart of the organism," and that it is this burst opening that becomes formative of the cerebral cortex's eminent status and the infant's belief in an inner world.¹¹² Hence, Lacan argues that the infant's realization of its state as "fragmented" occurs because of its "*specific prematurity of birth*," which causes the cerebral cortex to shape the structure of human knowledge as paranoiac from its growing awareness of others and the constant threats – whether real or imagined – that it believes are directed at its own fragility, and which, it further believes, will bring about its disintegration.¹¹³ In other words, Lacan theorizes that the inner and the social worlds become opposed because the infant is aware that it lacks the power that it believes others have. In this sense, the specular *I* becomes a catalytic force that forever attempts to compensate for its own natural inadequacy as it strives to burst out of its feeble, pod-shell body in order to establish the specular *I* as dominant, but which only "gives rise to an inexhaustible squaring of the ego's audits."¹¹⁴

Lacan states that this structure of the *I* formation establishes an inside and outside, and he compares this structure to that of the "fortified camp" or "stadium," wherein "the subject bogs down in his quest for the proud, remote inner castle whose form (sometimes juxtaposed in the same scenario) strikingly symbolizes the id."¹¹⁵ It is here in the "fortified structures" that Lacan finds the mental sphere's composition to comprise "obsessive neurosis: inversion, isolation,

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

reduplication, undoing what has been done, and displacement.”¹¹⁶ Yet Lacan declares that if he were to build on the subjective data of these neuroses, it would lead him to an “unthinkable” conclusion, which is that of the “absolute subject.”¹¹⁷ Understanding the “absolute subject” as an impossible formulation because of the linguistic structures of the symbolic realm and because the nature of desire is always mediated by the other, Lacan explains that he has chosen to adopt “a *method of symbolic reduction* as [his] guiding grid” in order to ground his hypothesis in objective data.¹¹⁸ Rather than asserting that the specular *I* results in an absolute subject, he suggests that the specular *I* “establishes a genetic order in *ego defenses*,” which situates the alienating processes of the specular *I* – the aforementioned obsessive neuroses and “hysterical repression and its returns” – as prior to the paranoid alienation that causes the specular *I* to turn into the social *I*.¹¹⁹

Although Lacan fails to elaborate on how he has collected such data – that is, how he was able to observe these *internal processes* in which the infant re-situates the obsessive neuroses that stem from the realization of self *as prior to* the alienation of that primary narcissistic identification – he nevertheless states that reorganization of the specular *I*’s “obsessive inversion and isolating processes” is necessary for the subject to emerge as the social *I*.¹²⁰ In this sense, Lacan claims that the mirror stage can only come to an end after the infant has recognized its own *imago* and after “primordial jealousy” has been instated in the individual, as these developments allow the *I* to become linked to “socially elaborated situations” in which the *I* and

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 79.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

all of human knowledge is *tipped* into the symbolic order.¹²¹ According to Lacan's theory then, the social *I* begins to materialize in the symbolic order when the subject starts to become mediated by the other's desire, and he states that this can only take place once the specular *I* is established as secondary to the social *I*, thereby becoming a repression.

However, the specular *I*, in becoming a repression, does not disappear, as it remains to be an irreducible aspect of the subject. The irreducibility of the specular *I* is what causes the subject's fragile and fragmented state to carry over into adulthood, as "every instinctual pressure constitutes a danger, even if it corresponds to a natural maturation process;" however, Lacan states that the maturation process becomes normalized through cultural intervention – as can be seen in the Oedipus complex – and in this sense, Lacan intimates that the process of normalization provides the subject with the social acceptance for which it yearns.¹²²

Yet, in citing the Oedipus complex, Lacan argues that the "dynamic opposition" between the narcissistic libido and sexual libido as described by proponents of existentialism has demonstrated how the destructive and death instincts of the alienating *I* function and its relationship to the narcissistic libido proves "the aggressiveness deriving therefrom in all relations with others, even in relations involving aid of the most good-Samaritan variety."¹²³ From here, Lacan digresses into a discussion on altruism, and claims that "true altruism" cannot exist, as the subject's otherness reveals that the subject's philanthropic gestures are actually self-serving because what the subject truly desires is to be desired by others. In other words, Lacan

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

states that altruism is not motivated by a desire to help others, but is inspired by the subject's desire for social acceptance.

Lacan argues that this self-service of the subject's philanthropic gestures indicates an "existential negativity," wherein the subject's ego confuses its constitutive misrecognitions in the symbolic order *for an illusion of self-sufficiency*, but for which "subjective impasses" inescapably arise:

... a freedom that is never so authentically affirmed as when it is within the walls of a prison; a demand for commitment that expresses the inability of pure consciousness to overcome any situation; a voyeuristic-sadistic idealization of sexual relationships; a personality that achieves self-realization only in suicide; and a consciousness of the other that can only be satisfied by Hegelian murder.¹²⁴

However, Lacan claims that these dire impasses remain mostly latent and only manifest themselves at the level of the id in the subjects suffering from neurosis or psychosis. For the healthy subject – if such a subject can be said to exist – the function of misrecognition operates in order to establish the ego's identification with others, wherein self-sufficiency is established in order to situate an illusion that demarcates the subject's agency from the subject's construction as that which is mediated by the desire for the other.

Although Lacan believes the phenomenon of self-sufficiency in the subject to be an illusory necessity, it nevertheless allows for the subject to establish the boundaries between the inner and the outer worlds. Whether the specular *I* becomes replaced by the social *I* in the inner

¹²⁴ Ibid, 80.

world, or whether the *I*'s mental permanence allows for the specular *I* to remain there unscathed, and, in the Hegelian sense, “in itself,” the subject nevertheless gains a sense of self-sufficiency and agency through this access to its inner world, which, at the same time, it feels is constantly at odds with reality. Although Lacan would likely argue that the *feeling* of self-sufficiency and agency in the subject is just that, the very feat of establishing a sense of self-sufficiency and agency suggests the development of a differentiated perception in the subject. While language and the mediation of the subject by the desire for the other have constructed the subject's understanding of the world and allow it to interact and form meaning with others through its reiteration and approximation of socially-intelligible concepts, it seems as though the subject's differentiated perception and its interpretative abilities allow the subject to establish a sense of self-sufficiency and agency nonetheless.

Although Lacan portrays this self-sufficient agency as phantasmic and as that which only exists in the inner world – except in the cases of those suffering from psychosis or neurosis – de Beauvoir suggests that in becoming a part of the subject, it nevertheless resurfaces on the subject as an embodiment, and in this way, becomes a physical attribute on the subject in the social domain. In *materializing* as a physical attribute in the social domain, the mental permanence of the inner identity does not only appear to be the locus of transcendence and becoming in the subject, but also the cataclysm that gives rise to dialectical materialism and the dialectic of naturalization. Hence, Simone de Beauvoir's account of the subject's becoming underscores the shortcomings in Lacan's theory about the mirror stage as she demonstrates how the subject's desire for transcendence does not lead to the subject's neurosis or psychosis, but that the subject's constant becoming forces social intelligibility to evolve according to the subject's

reinterpretations. In this sense, de Beauvoir's theory aligns with the philosophy of dialectical materialism. In the following section, I will show how abjection and the materiality of the signifier offer a platform on which the mental permanence of the inner identity's differentiated perception can naturalize new concepts.

The Subject's Becoming: Dialectical Materialism, Abjection, & the Materiality of the Signifier

The philosophy of dialectical materialism suggests that the material world is interpretable and changeable since there are a variety of contradictions that exist in the world, which subjects can resolve through a number of interpretable solutions. In this way, dialectical materialism addresses the idea that the only way in which subjects can access the material world is through human interpretation and linguistic relations. Hence, through the interpretation of matter, matter – and, why it matters – is created. By conferring intelligibility onto that which is physical through language, the physical object takes on a new shape through the interpretation and values that have been placed on it conceptually. In her chapter “The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary,” Judith Butler addresses this idea, arguing that “language and materiality are not opposed, for language both is and refers to that which is material, and what is material never fully escapes from the process by which it is signified.”¹²⁵ Matter, then, *influences* interpretation and thought, but as matter can never escape the process of signification, it would follow that the substance of the psyche likewise influences physicality.

¹²⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of “sex”* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 38.

Butler's theory about the materiality of the signifier demonstrates how *subjects take up the signifier*, adopt it, reinterpret it, re-appropriate it, and re-signify it, and that matter and language do not stand outside the realm of human (inter)action. In this sense, Butler challenges the idea that language can always portray an accurate representation of the material world or individual experience. The idea that matter could sufficiently stand for the word that refers to it or vice versa would imply that the sign and the signifier are static, that interpretation is a myth, and that human agency is illusory. Although this approach fits nicely with Lacan's theories about the phantasmic and impotent nature of the specular *I*, it seems presumptuous to conclude that the human subject does not play a part in the evolution of language and social intelligibility. In other words, matter and thought connote meaning onto one another, which never becomes an idled process. The proliferative ways in which the materiality of the signifier is reinterpreted and re-signified by subjects allows matter and intelligibility to evolve. The psyche, although initially influenced by matter, is always beyond matter and re-conceptualizing matter because of its synthesizing faculties.

Because language and matter are never opposed – as matter influences language and language refers to matter – they engage in an evolutive dance of rotation and reformulation. To clarify, matter and the representations offered by language never statically stand for the other, but are in a constant process of becoming together. Materiality and language necessarily pose limits on each other, which allows for their relation to remain intact, but they are simultaneously never reduced to one another – identical to each other – as their meanings, values, and forms are constantly shifting through different domains and becoming reshaped. While materiality and signifiers exist in the social domain whereas concepts exist in the inner domain (as a result of

their corporeal lack), they are always accessible to one another, and indeed, always accessing each other *through a human subject*. Although subjects are constantly altering the concepts that connect language and matter, socially-constructed concepts that have become sedimented can sometimes appear indistinguishable from the words that refer to them and the matter they represent. Indeed, the very relation between the sign, signified, and signifier may seem natural or concrete. Although the three have become seemingly asymptotic, they have merely been naturalized within the dialectic of naturalization.

To examine the ways in which materiality and language become naturalized – hence, privileged – sedimentations, it is essential to return to Julia Kristeva’s theories, wherein she theorizes the abject. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva identifies the abject as the place where boundaries break down. Building from Lacan’s theories, Kristeva argues that the abject is a stage that takes place prior to the mirror stage, in which the infant begins to differentiate itself from the maternal body. In sensing its breaking-away from the wholeness of the real stage – the chora, as Kristeva refers to it – the infant is both horrified and compelled; it simultaneously yearns for the wholeness, while wanting to dissociate itself from it. Kristeva states that “abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory.”¹²⁶ Although abjection threatens danger, as it represents the unknown, the unrecognizable, and the unrepresentable, Kristeva argues that the abject simultaneously enables the self to emerge as separate from the maternal presence and the Other.

¹²⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), 5.

Because a breaking away from the real is necessary prior to the infant's ability to differentiate between the *imago* and the *I*, and later, the self and the Other, Kristeva argues that the abject becomes the "precondition of narcissism" in the mirror stage.¹²⁷ Kristeva identifies two causes that bring about the "narcissistic crisis" in the mirror stage and compels the individual into the symbolic: "*Too much strictness on the part of the Other*, confused with the One and the Law. The *lapse of the Other*, which shows through the breakdown of objects of desire."¹²⁸ Because the infant clings to its entangled identity with the Other for as long as possible, Kristeva states that the abject becomes the violent explosion of boundaries, wherein the ego undergoes a "death" when the infant realizes its individuation.¹²⁹ Due to this initial trauma, the abject always imperils the mirror stage and beyond (the symbolic), as the "psychically-invested" "material sputterings" of the infant and the later development of its linguistic relations shape its perception of the world.¹³⁰ An encroachment of the real becomes the threat of that trauma returning, as abjection in the symbolic presumably threatens a second annihilation of the ego, which would lead to the disintegration of the self as subject rather than of the self and the Other.

Hence, Kristeva identifies abjection as establishing the horror that becomes associated with unfamiliarity – of not being able to discern something as recognizable due to an explosion of boundaries – and as that which structures all of human knowledge as paranoiac. In reexamining Freud's observations of the little boy Hans, Kristeva points out how Hans

¹²⁷ Ibid, 13.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 15.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 39.

demonstrated that he had a considerable “sense” of things at an early age, but that he was not yet capable of ascertaining their “significance.”¹³¹ To recover from the discrepancy Hans sensed between his interpretation of the world and his use of language, Kristeva takes Freud’s conclusion of Hans’ linguistic actions as the distribution “between [the] narcissistic conversation drive and sexual drive” to be “the epistemophilic experience of Hans who wants to know himself and to know everything.”¹³² However, the discrepancy between Hans’ sense of the world and its significance gives rise to an encounter with abjection, as a rift between the two highlights how he is not yet capable of adequately approximating the social concepts of which he is the recipient. At this point in the individual’s development, which is around three-years of age, it becomes apparent that in order to be a validated being, one must understand the cultural significance behind one’s senses.

Because the desire to know oneself and to know everything is dichotomized with abjection, Kristeva claims that the development and maintenance of the superego depends on a never-ending fear of abjection. Indeed, Kristeva states: “To each ego its object, to each superego its object... On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, object and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture.”¹³³ Because the subject cannot know itself and know everything if the subject does not understand what its culture values, abjection becomes the primer of culture as it instills the fear of the real resurfacing, the bleeding of boundaries, and the disintegration of self. In this sense, abjection

¹³¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), 34.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 2.

compels the subject to avoid such a fate by embracing the cultural interpretations, and hence, the significance of those interpretations – *the received norms from society* – in order to become someone who is recognizable and who can participate in socially-intelligible activities. Hans can only prove his worth by demonstrating that he understands the significance of things – of himself and of everything – and he must do this by internalizing and interpreting the sedimentation of social concepts, as his narcissistic conversation drive alone will not yield the cultural significance of things, but only lead to abjection due to his inability to understand, define, associate, and differentiate.

Kristeva's reexamination of Hans' linguistic development demonstrates that while abjection can manifest in a number of ways, which can range from bodily fluids to the corpse, it can also manifest in the symbolic on the linguistic level. Abjection is not merely the failure to recognize one's kin, but it encompasses everything dichotomized with social intelligibility. It appears to resist signification since it represents the unrepresentable, but in this sense, it becomes the compelling agent in the dialectic of naturalization, as subjects are driven to form meaning when faced with the unnamed or unknown. Because Kristeva suggests that abjection becomes the primer of culture, she implies that abjection leads to acculturation and the coerced construction of subjects, as it necessitates that the signifier and signified remain intact; their very cleavage has the power to upset intelligibility, as the unity with which they are prescribed has become naturalized, recognizable, and intelligible.

However, in *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva simultaneously illustrates that the encounter with abjection is an ongoing threat throughout the subject's life because the subject's perceptions of

the world begin to form prior to its full immersion in language. Because the infant's psychic life begins to develop prior to language acquisition, Kristeva indicates that, to some extent, the subject's development of a differentiated perception bars it from complete mimicry. Although Kristeva claims that abjection often encourages subjects to adopt and reiterate the sedimentation of received norms, abjection also appears to become a path for new concepts to emerge, as subjects can only resolve encounters with abjection through interpretation.

In her interpretation of Kristeva's work, Butler argues that the ostensibly natural and immutable relationship between the signifier and signified is both a linguistically- and socially-constructed convention. Butler notes that because the signified is an interpretation of the sign and has become incorporated within the signifier, the signifier itself becomes a material thing because the signifier's association with the signified (concept) likewise connects it with the material reality of the sign. In other words, Butler reveals how the sign becomes displaced into the signifier as the signified, which conceptually materializes the signifier as the object to which the signifier refers becomes tied to it in the form of the concept. However, the signified is an interpretation of the sign, not the sign itself, and regardless of how ingrained – or sedimented – the relationship between the sign, signified, and signifier becomes within the realm of social intelligibility, the very process of signification becomes a way in which the sign itself morphs its contours to fit the signifier/signified that refers to it.

In this way, language and matter become naturalized, sedimented, as reinterpretation and re-signification can threaten abjection and destroy the borders of intelligibility. In this sense, a disjunction between the signifier and the sign would result in the displacement of the

sedimentation of the signified and expose the signified as a mere fabrication that serves as a connection between the signifier and the sign. However, as Ferdinand de Saussure claims, the signifying triad is arbitrary, and the signifier and the signified are only related based on convention. Butler argues that it would stand to reason, then, that the borders of intelligibility can expand – that they might even prove plastic – *through the displacement of the signified*, and that as a result, the signifying triad may be open to reinterpretation, and perhaps, varying interpretations.

It is for this reason that Butler claims that reinterpretation and re-signification must take place through the adoption of the lesbian phallus. Because intelligibility depends on linguistic relations – definitions, antonyms, synonyms, metonyms, metaphors, synecdoches, etc. – Butler argues that the phallogocentrism that rules language and dictates matter can only be altered or disrupted by a proliferation of interpretations. Rather than calling for the swift destruction of phallogocentrism, which would ostensibly lead to abjection on a socially linguistic scale, Butler calls for subjects to re-appropriate the phallic signifier as the lesbian phallus in order to re-signify matter and bring about new naturalizations. However, by denoting this practice in which she urges individuals to adopt as assuming the “lesbian phallus,” she undoubtedly evokes an abjection in and of itself, as she refers to an unnatural image – counter to the regulatory ideal and the social ideal of biological dimorphism.

Yet the very reiteration of the phrase proves constitutive: it recalls the phallic mother, the hermaphrodite, the transsexual, and individuals seeking sexual reassignment. In using the phrase “lesbian phallus,” Butler momentarily exposes her audience to abjection; indeed, the very phrase

is briefly at risk for falling outside the realm of intelligibility as that which is horrifying, unnatural, unviable – the woman with a penis. However, in using the phrase ‘lesbian phallus,’ Butler compels her audience to suture an abject notion, as she forces her audience to connect ‘lesbian’ with ‘phallus,’ to provide their own interpretation and framework, and to naturalize what appears to be an abject concept. For Butler, it appears as though abjection is not merely the threat of unintelligibility – the threat of the annihilation of the superego in the symbolic – as the subject’s position in the symbolic and its ability to re-signify the materiality of the signifier allows the subject to form new connections and a new self as a result of those burgeoning associations.

The suturing over of fissures and gaps, navigating trauma, horror, melancholia, and dislocation, all become paths in which naturalization occurs. Materiality and language do not stand as a static and inaccessible entity to the human subject, as the human subject constantly creates and recreates matter, language, and social concepts. Indeed, the material world, language, and social concepts are constructions created by the human subject and the conventions regulating the human subject. While materiality and language inhabit a different domain than that of conceptualization – which I will hereby refer to as the social and the inner domains – the human subject is constantly occupying both domains, navigating through them, negotiating them, as the subject is the point of access to those domains.

As Simone de Beauvoir illustrates in *The Second Sex*, the subject harbors a split consciousness: it is aware of its corporeal and cultural limitations in the social domain, but inside itself, it is always attempting to transcend itself, which allows the differentiated perception of the

subject's inner identity to reinterpret and re-conceptualize matter and language. This "inside itself" resurfaces on the individual as an embodiment, which is discernible in the social domain and marks the subject as a *becoming*. The subject is not a static or idle thing, but a vehicle that is endlessly navigating the world and searching for its destination, and because of this, the subject reshapes the materiality of the world and itself in the process of its becoming. Although de Beauvoir concedes that the subject is culturally and corporeally limited, the subject is also constrained linguistically as it is through language that the limitations (and possibilities) of culture and matter become naturalized and intelligible. Nevertheless, de Beauvoir's notion of the inner identity as the locus of transcendence and becoming in the body suggests that it is through the reinterpretation and re-signification of social norms that possibilities open up for the cultural and corporeal materiality of the body, and for social intelligibility more generally.

While de Beauvoir attempts to illustrate the ways in which she witnesses the subject's becoming occurring in the women of her time, it might be appropriate to adopt the language of another discipline here in order to offer a metaphorical lens to the ways in which that discipline understands the movement from one dimension (or, domain) to another. Indeed, the mathematical concept of the imaginary unit and its rotation through the "Real" and "Imaginary" Dimensions of the Cartesian coordinate system might offer a better way in which to critically engage with the theories put forth by Jacques Lacan and Simone de Beauvoir, as the imaginary unit's rotation through the Cartesian coordinate system depicts an "I" (or, "*i*") that undergoes change each time it receives or creates a new interpretation of itself (or, each time it gains an additional power of itself). In this sense, the dialectic of naturalization as demonstrated by the rotational properties of the imaginary unit – or, the number *i* – will show how matter, language,

and social intelligibility become naturalized, and how the sedimentation of those naturalizations always rest on the arbitrary and unstable bedrock of the materiality of the signifier.

The Dialectic of Naturalization as Formative of the “i”

In mathematics, the imaginary unit is used to stretch the real number system into the complex number system. Somewhat humorously, the imaginary unit returns to the idea of Cartesianism and to Rene Descartes himself for his use of “graphs to plot and analyze mathematical functions” in the seventeenth century, which gave rise to what is now known as the Cartesian coordinate system.¹³⁴ Although the use of grids in mathematics was not novel, Descartes “set up the rules we use now for his particular version of a coordinate system in two dimensions defined on a flat plane by two axes.”¹³⁵ Not surprisingly, Descartes’ coordinate system ostensibly adheres to the Cartesian ideals of mind-body dualism, as its two axes – the X and the Y – represent the Real Dimension and the Imaginary Dimension, respectively. Although Rene Descartes did not discover the imaginary unit, his particular version of a coordinate system that contains Cartesian ideals nevertheless offers a space in which the imaginary unit’s core property can be displayed at the same time as it offers an apt lens to understand the mutable and immutable nature of the subject and the materiality of the signifier.

In his book *An Imaginary Tale: The Story of $\sqrt{-1}$* , Paul Nahin describes the history of the number *i*. Dating back to Ancient Egypt, the number *i* was not considered a useful mathematical tool until a Norwegian surveyor, Caspar Wessel, discovered its rotational properties in the

¹³⁴ Jan Van Sickle, *Basic GIS Coordinates* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2004), 2.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

eighteenth century. For the purposes of depicting how the rotational properties of i operate within the Cartesian coordinate system and how that operation relates to the dialectic of naturalization, Nahin's explanation of how the number i works will provide enough context for its metaphorical appropriation to the dialectic of naturalization in this chapter:

Multiplying by $\sqrt{-1}$ is, geometrically, simply a rotation by 90° in the counterclockwise (CCW) sense... Multiplying by i gives a 90° CCW rotation to the vector, rotating it into the second quadrant... Because of this property, $\sqrt{-1}$ is often said to be the *rotation operator*, in addition to being an imaginary number.¹³⁶

Because i 's core property is $i^2 = -1$, i can be thought of as a mathematical catalyst, as it is able to navigate through different dimensions. Although all real numbers exist in the Real Dimension while i and $-i$ reside in the Imaginary Dimension, i is capable of moving into the Real Dimension when it is put to the power of two. When i is cubed or put to the power of three, it returns to the Imaginary Dimension as $-i$, and to the power of four, i returns to the Real Dimension as $+1$.

The diagram and table provided below depict the rotational characteristics of i , and these references will visually illustrate the ways in which matter, language, and concepts become naturalized. More importantly, the rotational properties of i will show how the dialectic of naturalization becomes formative of the subject. I have added the quadrants "natural/ized matter," "origin/al matter," "fabricated matter," and "processed matter" to the diagram of the

¹³⁶ Paul Nahin, *An Imaginary Tale: The Story of $\sqrt{-1}$* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 54.

Cartesian coordinate system, and I will be referring to the “Real Dimension” as the “social domain” and the “Imaginary Dimension” as the “inner domain.” Although i is known as an imaginary number, the diagram below illustrates how it nevertheless occupies space within the geometric realm and how it becomes transmuted as it moves through the two dimensions with each addition of power it receives. Because the Cartesian coordinate system has a “Real” and “Imaginary” dimension and because the core property of the number i is rotational, these two mathematical tools provide a space that visually depicts: 1.) how subjects are always in a state of becoming, as they negotiate the social mirror’s reifications and disputations with their own interpretations; 2.) how socially-constructed concepts become naturalized through reification and reiteration; and, 3.) how the materiality of the signifier becomes malleable through subjects’ reinterpretations, re-conceptualizations, and re-significations.

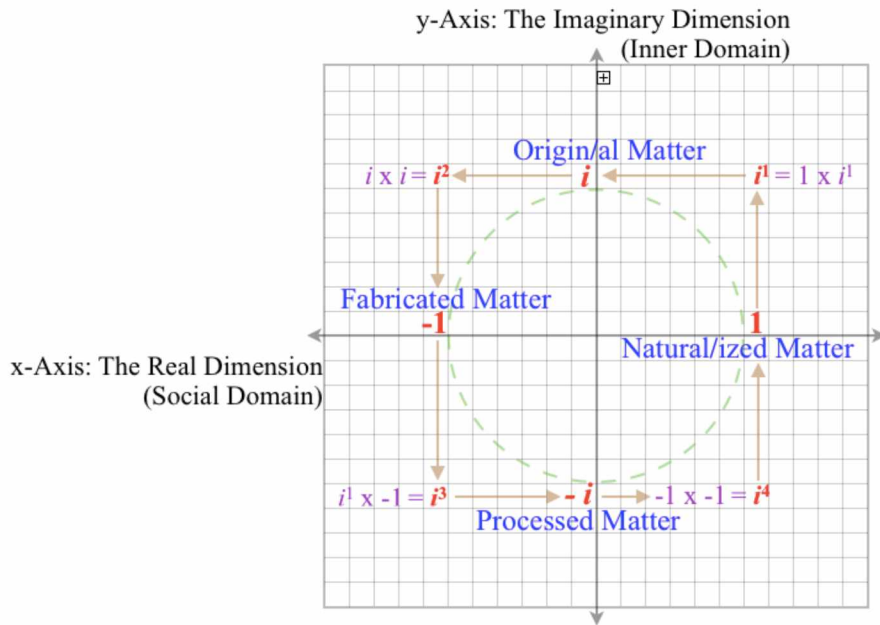


Figure 1: The Dialectic of Naturalization

Table 1: Mathematics of the Number i

1.) $1 \times 1 = 1$	2.) $i = 1 \times i^1$	3.) $i^2 = i \times i = -1$
4.) $i^3 = (i \times i) \times i = -1 \times i = -i$	5.) $i^4 = (i \times i) \times (i \times i) = -1 \times -1 = 1$	6.) $i^5 = i^4 \times i = 1 \times i = i$; and so on.

In mathematics, all numbers, real and imaginary, carry an invisible one that stands before them. If the starting place of the body is placed in the quadrant of natural/ized matter as “one” – existing in the real and whole with the maternal body – then the cataclysmic force of the abject propels it into the imaginary stage (inner domain) as the connection between self and Other, or “one” and “I,” begins to break down.¹³⁷ This displacement of the infant in the imaginary stage becomes the place where the ego, *i*, is formed. The development of the ego as *i* in the quadrant of origin/al matter is *both original and the origin of self*. Kristeva argues that in both instances of the narcissistic crisis,

...the abject appears in order to uphold “I” within the Other. The abject is the violence of mourning for an “object” that has always already been lost. The abject shatters the wall of repression and its judgments. It takes the ego back to its source on the abominable limits from which, in order to be, the ego has broken away – it assigns it a source in the non-ego, drive, and death. Abjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance.¹³⁸

Having undergone a death of the ego as a result of the narcissistic crisis, the individual is left as *i*, separate from others, in itself, and must adopt language in order to express its needs, desires, and

¹³⁷ In mathematics, all numbers have an invisible 1 that stands before them, which is meant to signify that 1 is multiplied to the number that follows. However, mathematicians only write in the otherwise invisible 1 when it serves a significant purpose to the equation. For the purposes of the dialectic of naturalization, *1i* is meant to represent the mother and infant before the infant begins to realize the disintegration between self and other.

¹³⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), 15.

begin forming connections with others, as it ultimately discovers narcissism to be ephemeral and unsatisfactory because of the powerlessness of that position. In this sense, the infant attributes significance to the non-ego of the social domain.

In finding significance to exist in the social domain, the infant is compelled back into the social domain through its adoption of language, and expresses itself in relation to the rudimentary understanding it has developed from the natural/ized matter (language, social norms, culture) that it has already received. Mathematically, the movement of i to -1 occurs when i has been squared; hence, the infant's movement back into the social domain – to the quadrant of fabricated matter – occurs when the infant applies what it believes to be the power of itself to its social enactment of self. Not yet having fully developed its superego, the enactment or performance of self unfolds as a fabricated matter in the social domain. Its actions are still largely based on need, which it often confuses with its desires; it demands rather than asks, and in this sense, becomes a little tyrant in its vestigial ego-like state. Its performance is not natural, but a precocious imitation of what it finds to be natural. Due to the uncanniness of its behavior, *every social or linguistic act it performs becomes the recipient of either a reification or disputation from the social mirror it attempts to reflect*, as the society likewise attempts to shape the infant into something that is culturally recognizable, and hence, signifiable.

As the individual progresses through this stage, it finds its enactment of self to be limited by its own corporeality, and as linguistic relations further develop, the individual starts to realize the cultural and linguistic restrictions imposed on it as well. The individual begins to discover the arbitrariness between the signifier and signified, as it is constantly reminded of its

misinterpretation and misuse. Abjection as loss of significance, lack of language, and the threat of death always looms on the borders of cultural intelligibility that are constantly reinstated through the reiteration of values in the social domain *because of the ostensible stability of the signifier*. Hence, with every received response in the quadrant of fabricated matter, the individual obtains a further understanding – and formulation – of itself in relation to others and based on its perceptions, which propels it back into the inner domain to become processed matter. In the terms of *i*, *i* is put to the power of three: in the quadrant of fabricated matter, the individual acted as that which it thought it was, and through its performance in the social domain, received a response that further conceived the becoming of its identity. To clarify, the physical embodiment of the individual's differentiated perception further formulates the individual's sense of self as its emergence is individuated; in addition, the response the individual receives from the social mirror due to its individuation becomes an incorporation of the individual, for which the individual must then interpret and negotiate. As a result, the individual is no longer identical to its original self in its ideal-ego state, as it has created and received additional conceptions of itself.

Having transmuted as a result of incorporating two further formulations of self, the individual returns to the inner domain in the quadrant of processed matter. Here, the individual negotiates the disputations or reifications it received from the social mirror through reflection and interpretation. In order to understand the significance of its sense of the world, it is in the quadrant of processed matter that the individual must internalize aspects of the cultural norms, as well as the disputations or reifications, it received in the social domain. As the individual develops its superego, the individual dichotomizes its superego with abjection as the individual

attempts to negotiate its inner identity with the assignments that have been placed on its social identity; a divide between the two is indicative of the individual's fragmentation, and suggests that the individual is not properly signifying the received norms of society. Just as Michel Foucault claims in *Discipline and Punish* that the recognizable soldier cannot materialize until he has *become* the part, the individual constantly strives to achieve fluidity in order to overcome its fragmentation by negotiating its inner identity with its social identity. Nevertheless, the individual who is the recipient of a response from the social mirror is awarded a verification of itself for its very acknowledgement in the social domain.

In this way, the disputation of the social mirror strangely acts as a reification of the individual's identity: the individual does not retract into the quadrant of origin/al matter, which would apparently result in the regression of self into an ideal-ego-like state, nor does abjection result in the complete obliteration of social recognizability. Abjection is always threatening, but it only becomes a true threat when it receives no response – when an utterance, act, or thought is incapable of reiteration – as abjection represents an intrusion of the real in the symbolic. Due to the individual's verification of self from the social mirror, the individual has become an established subject that can signify or re-signify matter. In this sense, the subject has a “choice” to modify or solidify, to reduce or produce – and finally, synthesizing an understanding of self, returns itself, reformulated, to the quadrant of natural/ized matter.

In returning to the quadrant of natural/ized matter, the individual becomes a subject that appears seamless and recognizable. The dialectic of naturalization produces a subject that has undergone the practice and revision of acculturation; cultural values are inscribed on the subject,

but it has also developed a personality that does not always align with the prescriptions of society, as its self-reflexive, inner identity becomes physically embodied. Although the physical embodiment of the subject's inner identity may be jarring, in returning full circle to the quadrant of natural/ized matter, the subject nevertheless has the ability to posit itself as natural. Having been the recipient of social norms, enacting them, obtaining a sense of self from the social mirror, and interpreting various interactions, the subject has negotiated and renegotiated its inner and social identities by suturing over any discernible incongruities. In becoming naturalized – appearing seamless – the subject's social and inner identities are coextensive. Yet, in returning to the social domain, the subject is still exposed to the social mirror's reifications and disputations, and because the subject is the conglomeration of (oftentimes opposing) prescribed constructions and interpretations, it must continue to mediate its two identities; in this sense, the subject remains in a state of becoming itself.¹³⁹

Because the body is a conglomeration of prescribed constructions and personal interpretations, the subject continuously undergoes the dialectic of naturalization by navigating through the inner and social domains in order to suture the disparities within its split identity. In this way, the subject's inner and social identities are not exactly distinct from one another, but constantly work to reformulate the subject into what appears to be a uniform semblance. Similar to how the sedimentation of social concepts transpire – thereby creating the illusion that linguistic concepts provide a fair representation of the material world – the inner and social

¹³⁹ Mathematically, i has been put to the power of four to return to the quadrant of natural/ized matter; i^4 .

identities are constantly becoming more like one another, as they continuously reshape each other with every addition of self that the subject receives or creates.

Hence, the human subject is not exempt from the process of signification nor the arbitrariness of the signifying triad: if the biological body is the subject's sign and the inner identity its signifier, then the subject's stylized body (what appears in the social domain as its social identity) is its signified. Because abjection is always imminent due to the subject's fragmented state, there cannot be a disparate cleavage within the signifying triad, but especially between the signifier (inner identity) and signified (social identity). In this sense, the subject must continue negotiating its inner and social identities in order to appear naturalized, which will only ever prove to be an asymptotic and approximative endeavor.

Displacing the Sedimentation of the Signified

Rather than becoming bogged down by the mathematics of the number i , the number i is meant to offer a metaphorical lens to the ways in which matter, language, and cultural intelligibility become transmuted through the human subject, as the human subject is the point of access to materiality and language. Because the number i is displaced into a different quadrant with every addition of power it is given, the movement of the number i illustrates how the subject – and social intelligibility more generally – are constantly being reformulated or reified within the dialectic of naturalization. If, as Butler argues, there can be no reference to materiality without further formulating it, then the number i 's rotation within the Cartesian coordinate system depicts the process of that never-ending formulation, as it demonstrates how the subject's becoming requires a constant mediation between an objective understanding of the world with

the differentiated perception and individualized interpretations of the subject's inner identity. Moreover, with every additional power of self that the subject creates or receives, the subject generates a new version of itself in synthesizing the equation it is presented.

Because the signified is constantly restructuring the sign and the signifier in forever being gleaned and redeposited by subjects, it is always reshaping them even through the act of reification. In relating the addition of power and rotation of the number i to the subject, the appropriation of the number i is meant to demonstrate how the subject is constantly receiving a sense of self from the social mirror in the social domain, first as naturalized prescriptions and later as either reifications or disputations. Regardless of whether the subject's enactment of self is reified or disputed, in receiving its socially-perceived self, the subject is always compelled to interpret that return and incorporate that response within its very being. The subject's social reception is added to its perception of self, which further formulates the subject's sense of being, identity, and perception of the world. If reified, the subject's social reception may simply verify the identity to which the subject already 'knew' it had, or it may begin performing that identity with more conviction and less inhibition. Nevertheless, the reification of the subject's enactment of self is interpreted by the subject as having 'done it right,' and this interpretation becomes a further formulation of the subject. Wanting to clench to its reified identity, the subject embraces its social reification by pushing itself – and oftentimes others through the act of gender policing – to closely approximate the heteronormative ideals with which it has aligned itself. In this sense, the subject who reiterates heteronormative and phallogocentric ideals actively creates the sedimentation and naturalization of socially-constructed concepts.

Although the reiteration of cultural sedimentations – that is, heteronormative embodiments and beings – is the hegemonic norm, if the subject's inner and social identities appear unbroken, then the subject's enactment of self can likewise be reified. Reification from the social domain depends on the subject's ability to make its inner and social identities appear coextensive, as the subject encounters abjection when its fragmentation becomes apparent in either the inner or social domain. Because reification from the social mirror depends on the discernible association between the inner and social identities, non-normative existences can be reified as long as the subject emerges as seemingly whole in the social domain. Indeed, examples of non-normative existences that have been socially reified can be seen in the feminized gay man and the phallicized lesbian. Both of these identities or existences have been explored in the fields of queer and gender studies, cinema, television, and literature. Because these identities have become sedimentations to some extent, it proves plausible to suture the breach between biological dimorphism and the heterosexist ideal. Moreover, the naturalization and sedimentation of these existences illustrate that the disparity between the signifier/signified and sign is more acceptable than the disparity between the signifier and the signified, as these existences demonstrate that non-normative gender identities can be reified even though they deviate from the conventional understanding of gender-as-sex. In this sense, these gender identities demonstrate how the conventions regulating language are crucial to the preservation of social intelligibility, but that the values and concepts assigned to the material world are nevertheless variable.

However, it is when the subject's social enactment of self is disputed by the social mirror that true abjection and the proliferative re-signification of new concepts and identities can take

place. When the subject becomes the recipient of a disputation from the social mirror, the subject interprets its social disputation and feels compelled to negotiate the variance that is apparent between its social and inner identities. It faces abjection in the breaking down of its own boundaries: the idea it had of itself as whole and complete returns as fragmented and partial. However, in receiving a response from the social mirror – even as a disputation – the subject’s sense of self is nevertheless verified. It knows itself to be a signifying subject for the response it received, but it becomes troubled by the realization of its fragmented identity that it formerly took to be whole. At this point, the subject is presented with the de Beauvoirian choice: the subject can align and reduce itself to the norms prescribed to its social identity, or the subject can produce itself in relation to its inner identity and subvert the norms that attempt to regulate it. In reducing itself to its social identity, the subject may find haven in the social domain, but in doing so, the subject will constantly have to face its own fragmentation.

In choosing to subvert the norms that forcibly attempt to regulate the subject, the subject must nevertheless reduce the distance between its social and inner identities in the same fashion that the subject who received a reification from the social mirror reduces the distance between its social and inner identities. While the subject who received a reification typically performs that enactment of self with more vigor and takes that reification of itself in as the essence of itself, the subject who received a disputation and has chosen to identify with its inner identity must choose to exaggerate its inner identity in the social domain, thereby coextending its inner identity with its social identity. In reducing the distance between the inner and social identities, the subject is less vulnerable to the social mirror’s disputations that threaten abjection and social annihilation, as the stability of the self as signifier and its reiterative performance becomes recognizable,

naturalized, and sedimented. Indeed, in continually reasserting its inner identity in the social domain, the subject's social identity morphs to fit the contours of the subject's inner self, and the ongoing reiteration of the subject's inner identity in the social domain displaces the sedimentation of the signified and allows for new concepts to emerge in its place.

Because the signifying triad is arbitrary, unstable, and its apparent stability depends on reiteration, the displacement of the signified in the dialectic of naturalization becomes a way in which new concepts can emerge. Indeed, in terms of gender, identity, and sexuality, the proliferative reiteration of new interpretations can be a way in which to displace and de-privilege the phallogocentrism that rules over language, materiality, social intelligibility, and its subjects. However, in order for new concepts to become sedimented, the concepts that take the place of the displaced signified must also be reiterated. Although the signifying triad is arbitrary, its structure gives rise to intelligibility. de Saussure's claim that the signifier and the signified are merely related based on convention does not mean that that relation is inconsequential, as the connection between the two is crucial for sense and significance to emerge. While abjection and the suturing abilities of the materiality of the signifier allow for new matter, modes of being, and knowledge to manifest, re-signification must always be done through association. In this sense, new interpretations must be *materially justifiable*, as it is that which is *materially based* that can be shared in the social domain and later naturalized, reiterated, and sedimented.

Hence, to connect the signifier with the displaced signified effectively, and, for that matter, the inner identity with the subverted social identity, the subject must offer valid interpretations that can either be seen in the social domain or easily understood through the

associations made in language. If new interpretations, concepts, or identities fall outside of the realm of intelligibility, they must be reiterated – continuously – until they become intelligible and *materialize*. If true abjection is the breaking down of boundaries – the intrusion of the real in the symbolic – then the materiality of the signifier and its suturing abilities can defy the ease with which phallogocentrism relegates subjects to the spheres of social abjection and objectification by *naturalizing* the constant reiteration and recirculation of new interpretations.

To expose heteronormative lifestyles as mere approximations to naturalized constructions, subjects must displace the sedimentation of phallogocentric signifieds by re-conceptualizing and re-signifying received norms. In displacing phallogocentrism and embracing non-normative lifestyles as reiterative possibilities, bodies and existences that transgender heteronormativity can become naturalized. Moreover, the reiteration and naturalization of those non-normative modes of being allows those existences to become sedimented, and these socially-constructed sedimentations can then be adopted and appropriated by other subjects. Because the dialectic of naturalization is an ongoing yet asymptotic process, the subject never remains the same, but is always transmuting, and always in the process of becoming itself. In this sense, the dialectic of naturalization shows how the creation of new concepts is a never-ending process and how the naturalization and sedimentation of social concepts are constantly taking place.

Because the dialectic of naturalization illustrates how there are numerous modes of being at any given time that do not solely manifest from heterosexuality, homosexuality, or, for that matter, sexuality in general, the masculine-feminine dichotomy and its incessant reiteration is an

illusion in which the collective has invested. Gender and identity are variable, and it is not the real or symbolic threat of castration that compels the subject to take shape, but the fear of social abjection that encourages the subject to make sense and significance of itself and of the world. However, this does not mean that the threat of abjection always leads to heteronormativity or normative sexuality, as the tension between the subject's inner and social identities demonstrates how the subject is constantly compelled to mediate its desire for the other with the perseverance of its differentiated perception. Sexuality, indeed, is a primer of the subject, but as not all of the subject's experiences are necessarily sexual, it is fallacious to assume that the subject solely forms its identity around anatomical differentiation and sexual preferences. Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis have sought to prove this, and in seeking to prove that sex determines gender, these theories have materialized one version of reality that supports the idea that gender is determined by sex.

While heteronormativity appears to be a safe haven for subjects to arrogate based on its ostensible naturalness, its reiterations of anatomical sex and heterosexuality have long served to prescribe identities and existences onto subjects forcibly, rendering privilege and power to certain groups, while disenfranchising others. By reiterating normative gendered categories, the hegemonic status of phallogocentrism becomes secured, as do the reiterations of misogyny, racism, and homophobia. While the proliferation of individuated identities and non-normative sexualities can upset that heteronormative security, it is only through the reiteration and ongoing naturalization of the differentiated perceptions of subjects that the hegemonic status of phallogocentric concepts can be displaced. Moreover, it is only through the proliferative

reiteration and naturalization of the differentiated perceptions of *transgendered subjects* that will bring about new sedimentations and expand cultural intelligibility.

The differentiated perception of the subject's inner identity and its resistance to the cultural norms it receives only become possible through the threat of abjection, as it is only when the subject is threatened with abjection – the explosion of boundaries, the disintegration of self, and the arbitrariness of signification – that the subject becomes compelled to interpret, negotiate, and naturalize the disparities it faces. In this sense, abjection compels the subject to constantly make sense of itself and the world it inhabits through interpretation and association. And, because the subject depends on materiality and language to make sense of and find significance in the world, the materiality of the signifier and cultural intelligibility are constantly altering based on the interpretations and values that subjects are endlessly assigning to them. Hence, the process in which this linguistic, material, and cultural evolution takes place is always gradual, despite its ongoing nature, as the matter and language that precede the subject have resulted in the stratification of cultural intelligibility, wherein the displacement of the signified can only occur through the proliferative re-signification of individual subjects.

In this sense, the social concepts that have become ingrained in the subject's mind are not easily displaced, but are steadily displaced, as re-conceptualizations and re-significations must be justifiable. Hence, *the displacement of the signified must always be materially justifiable*, as the naturalization of the signified's displacement is contingent on the reiterability of the new concept and its potential to serve as the asymptotic curve that links the sign to the signifier. This necessity for a material connection is also true for the individual's inner and social identities, as the

individual is first an object of the culture and its prescriptions, and it is only later when it can become a subject of its own volition. For the subject to matter, it must be recognizable, and to become socially recognized, it must be culturally intelligible. In accounting for its inner and social identities, the subject must constantly negotiate its interactions in the social domain with its perceptions and interpretations in order to formulate and reformulate itself into what appears to be a recognizable and uniform semblance. Hence, to appear intelligible and avoid social abjection, the subject must exist in a constant state of innovation and negotiation.

Although Lacan suggests that the subject, upon coming into language, is always mediated by the desire for the other and that the specular *I* becomes replaced by the social *I* because of this, it seems as though the mental permanence of the *I* in the subject and its fear of social abjection implicates the subject in an ongoing negotiation between its desire for self-preservation and its desire for the other. de Beauvoir's reinterpretation of Lacan's mirror stage, wherein she identifies the specular *I* as the subject's inner identity – and hence, the catalytic force that necessitates the subject's never-ending becoming – more aptly describes the reality of the human experience as an interpretative history. Because the subject's differentiated perception bars it from complete mimicry when reiterating the sedimentation of socially-constructed concepts, it can only borrow the concepts that precede it, which exposes the sedimentation of former concepts to vulnerability as new interpretations take their place. In this sense, the dialectic of naturalization demonstrates how the displacement of the sedimentation of the signified is constantly taking place as the mental permanence of the subject's differentiated perception constantly compels the subject to reinterpret the material reality of the world.

Chapter Three

Displacing Phallogocentrism: Rewriting Reductive Narcissism as Cannibalistic and Perverse in Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*

Matter, that thing the most solid and the well-known, which you are holding in your hands and which makes up your body, is now known to be mostly empty space. Empty space and points of light. What does this say about the reality of the world? – *Sexing the Cherry*

Appointing herself as the literary heir to Virginia Woolf, Jeanette Winterson continuously strives for freshness and innovation in her fiction, which is exemplified in her 1989 novel *Sexing the Cherry*. By combining elements of fantasy, history, fairy tales, and metafiction through the narratives of her main characters, Winterson's text creatively explores the notions of space, time, materiality, language, and identity. Winterson's decision to portray characters who are marginalized by – but nevertheless resistant to – mainstream culture and its ideologies suggests that, in her attempt to fill the shoes of her idol Woolf, it is only through the exploration of *new types of characters* that literature can move away from the “tired old end” that is constantly reiterated in mainstream literature and phallogocentric stories.¹⁴⁰ Resisting the linearity of an Aristotelian structure, the text likewise resists reiterating the sedimentation of heteronormative and phallogocentric concepts and instead challenges the audience to interpret those concepts in new ways by exposing them as grotesque and perverse through the use of allegory. Although the text has been criticized for its experimental use of narrative and for its ostensible androphobia, few critics have considered the allegorical elements in the text and the significance they have on the text as a whole.

Although the seventeenth century depicted in *Sexing the Cherry* is often couched in elements of fantasy whereas the twentieth century is grounded in a more realistic setting, few

¹⁴⁰ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989), 136.

critics have considered that the seventeenth-century characters may be the inner identities of the twentieth-century characters. If Jordan and the Dog-Woman are read as the inner identities of Nicolas and the chemist, it becomes apparent that the fantastical elements in the text are a projection of Nicolas' and the chemist's frustrations with the power structures that attempt to make them conform to mainstream and heteronormative existences. Winterson's decision to give Jordan and the Dog-Woman the majority of the narratives illustrates how it is only through the inner identities – and hence, the differentiated perceptions – of her characters that the socially-constructed sedimentations of heteronormativity and phallogocentrism can be examined, criticized, and subverted.

In order to portray the detrimental effects created by hegemonic concepts, Winterson allegorizes the notions of heteronormativity and phallogocentrism through the corporations against which the chemist protests in the twentieth century and through the male Puritans against whom the Dog-Woman fights in the seventeenth century. Winterson juxtaposes the phallogocentrism that the corporations epitomize with the chemist's desire for multiplicity, and the singular ideals that the Puritans embody with the Dog-Woman's loyalty to the more universal rule of Catholicism. By using the medium of allegory, Winterson depicts how heteronormative and phallogocentric concepts are a form of reductive narcissism – as the corporations and Puritans attempt to deny any reality that does not conform to their own – and she portrays her characters displacing the perversity and cannibalism of phallogocentric concepts through abjection, re-conceptualization, and re-signification.

Although Nicolas' and Jordan's narratives express a desire to escape from the restrictive and normalizing forces that they sense are encroaching upon their inner worlds, it is through the chemist's and the Dog-Woman's narratives that Winterson directly explores the notion of displacing the sedimentation of phallogocentrism. Indeed, Winterson's refusal to give the chemist and the Dog-Woman traditional names, and for that matter, to name them according to what they *do*, marks her decisive move to represent her female protagonists as existing outside of the phallogocentric notions that theorize the passivity of femininity. Winterson's decision to portray her female characters as active is further emphasized by her use of the banana as the narrative cue for the Dog-Woman and the chemist, as the banana suggests their phallic qualities and their already transgendered state.

Noticeably different from the tones of Nicolas' and Jordan's more contemplative narratives, the chemist's narrative begins with action-driven notions of destruction and re-creation as she imagines that she is the Dog-Woman who forces the corrupt leaders of the world to undergo "compulsory training in feminism and ecology."¹⁴¹ In her fantasy as the Dog-Woman, the chemist chews up the bullets that men shoot at her and snaps their guns between her fingers, while she kidnaps policy makers and throws them into "a sack such as kittens are drowned in."¹⁴² However, as her fantasy begins to fade back into her reality, Winterson reveals that the chemist is actually camping beside a mercury-polluted river in protest of the corporations that have been dumping waste into the river. By camping beside the river, the chemist is trying to raise public

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 139.

¹⁴² Ibid, 138.

and governmental awareness about the mercury and phosphorus levels that are in the water, but she is continually discredited by the corporation's in-house scientists.

Because the corporations have the money and influence to shape the public's perception and reality by discrediting the chemist's findings with their own in-house scientists, Winterson portrays the corporations as phallogocentric power structures. However, rather than conveying a concern for herself and the limitations imposed on her gender and identity in relation to phallogocentrism, the chemist epitomizes the notions of selflessness, empathy, and universal inclusion by becoming the martyr of her well-intentioned political cause. In this sense, Winterson does not depict the chemist as limited by her sexed status, but she portrays the chemist as a professional and pragmatic character that has been forced to go to extreme measures in an attempt to stop the hegemonic and phallogocentric powers of the corporations from inflicting harm on the Earth and its people. Because the imposition of gender is not a primary concern for the chemist and because the chemist already knows that her inner identity is the powerful and phallic Dog-Woman, Winterson depicts the chemist as a relatively self-reflexive – and for that matter, already transgendered – character.

Indeed, it is the chemist/Dog-Woman's self knowledge that allows her to persevere in her campaign when the corporation's in-house scientists try to discredit her findings, as the corporation's phallogocentric rhetoric cannot persuade her that her research is inaccurate. Because the chemist appears to know herself while nevertheless maintaining a grasp on reality in the social domain of the twentieth century, the chemist is both a product of the coercions of society and of her own self-construction. Hence, the chemist, as a constitutive being, has also

managed to become a constituted subject, and, in picking a fight with the power structures of corrupt ideologies, she demonstrates how the displacement of phallogocentrism can only take place through abjection and the re-signification of new concepts by means of her differentiated perception.

In this sense, the phallogocentrism that Winterson portrays through the chemist/Dog-Woman's narratives does not necessarily dwell on the imprisonment of gender since the chemist/Dog-Woman has already transcended the social prescriptions of her gender. Instead, the phallogocentric power that the chemist/Dog-Woman resists is portrayed as a hegemonic entity that produces singular, corrupt, and coercive ideologies in order to maintain its prominent position in the world. In this way, Winterson's text can be read as an exploration into gender and identity formation and as an exploration into individuality, universality, and the notion of multiplicity, as the chemist/Dog-Woman attempts to displace the singular rhetoric of phallogocentrism in order to replace it with a multiplicity of ideologies. However, by representing the rhetorics that the corporations and Puritans employ as singular, reductive, and hegemonic, Winterson demonstrates how the phallogocentric representations of language have the power to become formative of materiality, reality, identity, history, and even the future.

In considering the ways in which the sedimentation of phallogocentric concepts occur, Winterson portrays restrictive and singular ideologies as materializing through the group that is in power at the time *as those groups try to maintain their power through the use of rhetoric*. Indeed, Winterson shows how the Puritans and corporations ensure their continued rule by producing rhetorics that deny the existence of any other reality. However, Winterson also

considers the ways in which her characters can resist and displace such rhetorics, and the socially-constructed sedimentations of phallogocentrism more generally. Indeed, by dramatizing Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection in quite grotesque terms and by literally depicting Judith Butler's lesbian phallus before the chemist/Dog-Woman's narratives (by means of the banana that serves as their narrative cue), Winterson betrays a belief in the evolutive powers of language, and for that matter, in dialectical materialism and the dialectic of naturalization. In other words: throughout *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson hints that her characters will depose the regulatory powers that attempt to control them.

Winterson's decision to depict what appears to be the inner and social identities of her fragmented female protagonist challenges Jacques Lacan's theory about the mirror stage, while simultaneously highlighting the power her self-reflexive characters embody. Rather than portraying her characters as socially-constructed subjects devoid of agency, the way Winterson depicts her characters is reminiscent of de Beauvoir's theory about the transcendental becoming of the subject's inner identity. Because the majority of the narratives are given to the Dog-Woman, the chemist fantasizes that she is the Dog-Woman in order to work out her frustrations over the powerlessness she feels. Hence, by portraying the chemist/Dog-Woman as an already transgendered subject who embodies the notions of heroism for her concern of the Earth and its people, Winterson does not only give her fragmented female protagonist the power to re-signify the social fabric depicted in *Sexing the Cherry*, but she also creates a relatable and sympathetic character in order to encourage her audience to be critical of the power structures presiding over them.

Although the chemist is not introduced until the novel has neared its end and is only given one narrative, the chemist first describes herself as a giant raging war against the power structures that give rise to corrupt ideologies that destroy the earth and that result in the impoverishment and disenfranchisement of certain populations. In her re-creationist fantasy, the chemist “snatches” board members from the World Bank, generals from the Pentagon, and “world leaders from motorcades, from mansion house dinners, from embassies and private parties,” forcing “the fat ones to go on a diet” and all of the men to undergo “compulsory training in feminism and ecology.”¹⁴³ She imagines that her efforts transform “what used to be power [into what] is now co-operation,” and states that “on the seventh day [they] have a party at the wine lake and make pancakes with the butter mountain and the peoples of the earth keep coming in waves and being fed and being clean and being well.”¹⁴⁴

The chemist opens her narrative by stating, “I am a woman going mad. I am a woman hallucinating. I imagine I am huge, raw, a giant.”¹⁴⁵ By establishing the scene that follows as occurring in her imagination, the chemist clearly demarcates her reality from her fantasies while nevertheless depicting how they exist in her mind simultaneously. Because the chemist can differentiate between her fantasies and reality, Winterson demonstrates how the chemist is a self-reflexive character, and, in this sense, an empowered and powerful subject. By expressing her dissatisfaction with the power structures that have destroyed the earth and that have created “the problem of the Third World” in her narrative, the chemist pragmatically outlines her discontent with phallogocentrism in her imagination and counters the absurd arguments made by her

¹⁴³ Ibid, 139.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

illusory prisoners with “facts” and “statistics” from their own statistics.¹⁴⁶ Hence, the chemist, in being left with no “choice” other than to start “a one-woman campaign” in order to raise awareness about the mercury levels in the river that are resulting in fish dying and children contracting “strange scaly diseases which the government said had no connection with anything whatsoever,” demonstrates her universal concern for the well-being of humanity and the Earth.¹⁴⁷

In embracing abjection by eschewing the comfort of “[her] own flat with [her] things about [her]” and choosing to live an alternative lifestyle by camping beside the mercury-polluted river, the chemist “didn’t go away” as the corporations had hoped.¹⁴⁸ Rather, “[she] wrote articles and pushed fact sheets through front doors. [She] developed a passion for personal evangelism. [She] stopped housewives on street corners and working men in caffs. Where women were high-placed [she] asked for money and help.”¹⁴⁹ The chemist, believing in her cause, does not simply “go away, get older, [and] get bored” as her opponents hope, but allows herself to become “an object of scorn just to get [her] point across.”¹⁵⁰ Hence, the chemist embraces abjection and an alternative lifestyle in order to advocate for social and ecological change. Rather than remaining quiet about her findings and allowing time to deaden her cause, the chemist actively attempts to challenge the socially-constructed sedimentations that have been created by governments and big businesses by re-signifying their own tactics through the means of fact sheets and statistics. In choosing to abandon the comforts and the safe haven of a heteronormative lifestyle and in embracing abjection, the chemist illustrates how the displacement of phallogocentrism must first

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 140.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

take place through abjection and then through the use of socially-intelligible linguistic structures in order to re-signify new concepts and other “truths.”

However, in choosing to camp by the river to emphasize her point, the chemist states that “[the] cost to [herself] was high. Too high, [she] thought, when [she] was depressed, which was often.”¹⁵¹ Although the chemist maintains her resilience in order to advocate her cause, her depression and her isolation from others leads her to contemplate her childhood and her life in general. In recalling her loneliness as a child, the chemist remembers how

[Her] parents found [her] difficult, not the child they wanted. [She] was too intense, too physically awkward and too quiet for them. [Her] best times were outside with [their] dogs. Parents want to see themselves passed on in their children. It comforts them to recognize a twist of the head or a way of talking. If there are no points of recognition, if the child is genuinely alien, they do their best to feed and clothe, but they don’t love. Not in the transforming way of love.¹⁵²

Because the chemist remembers how, as a child, there were no points of recognition between her parents and herself, Winterson shows how the chemist – in failing to recognize her kin and vice versa – has always existed in an abject and counter existence. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva states that “abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory.”¹⁵³ Because “there [were] no points of recognition” between the

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid, 140-41.

¹⁵³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), 5.

chemist and her parents, Winterson characterizes the chemist as a subject who has long been relegated to the domain of abjection.¹⁵⁴

Nevertheless, Winterson describes the chemist as a person who has “a good degree, and [is] an attractive woman whom men liked to work with, [and who] could have taught in a university or got a job doing worthy work behind the scenes,” which demonstrates that the chemist does have the ability to interpellate herself within social regulations.¹⁵⁵ In this sense, the disconnection between the chemist and her kin indicates that, although the chemist can work within the regulations of society, the chemist is incapable of assuming a heteronormative existence. That is, if heteronormativity depends on the reiteration of heteronormativity in the following generations, and for that matter, depends on *longevity*, the chemist’s inability to identify with her parents and vice versa suggests that the chemist has always existed and can only ever exist in a reality that counters heteronormativity and phallogocentrism. Moreover, by noting that the chemist’s happiest childhood memories were outside with her *dogs*, Winterson further emphasizes the connection between the chemist and Dog-Woman. In other words, the chemist’s inability to identify with her parents and the social prescriptions of society led her to create her inner identity as the Dog-Woman.

The relationship between the chemist and the Dog-Woman becomes apparent when, reflecting on her childhood, the chemist reveals that she was overweight as a child, but claims that “[she] wasn’t fat because [she] was greedy; [she] hardly ate at all. [She] was fat because [she] wanted to be bigger than all the things that were bigger than [her]. All the things that had

¹⁵⁴ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989), 141.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 142.

power over [her].”¹⁵⁶ In explaining that her battle to be bigger than the things that had power over her was one that she intended to win, the chemist states, “It seems obvious, doesn’t it, that someone who is ignored and overlooked will expand to the point where they have to be noticed, even if the noticing is fear and disgust.”¹⁵⁷ Although the chemist’s willingness to accept the costs of fear and disgust in exchange for being noticed as a child depicts her determination to subvert normative social etiquette, it also highlights how she has always been inclined to self-deprecation in order to argue her point.

The need to be larger than the things that had power over her as a child leads her to memories in which she used to imagine that her parents’ house was an extension of herself. The chemist describes how she imagined that her parents’ house was “[an] environment suitable for a fantastic creature who needed to suck in the warmth and nourishment until it was ready to shrug off the shell and burst out... [and that she] was a monster in a carpeted egg.”¹⁵⁸ Because the chemist used to imagine her parents’ house as “a shell to contain [her],” Winterson implies that the chemist, as a child, believed that her parents’ house was her *social identity* from which she would eventually need to break free.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, the chemist metaphorically describes how she transcended her social identity when she left home: “There I go, my shoulders pushing into the corners of the room, my head uncurling and smashing the windows. Shards of glass everywhere, the garden trodden in a single footprint. Micromegas, 200 miles high.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 141.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

In depicting the chemist as bursting out of the shell of her parents' house, Winterson portrays the chemist's abjection, not as resulting in her degeneration into a state of social unintelligibility, but as allowing the chemist to break free from the regulations of heteronormativity and phallogocentrism. The chemist reflects on how she lost "wheelbarrows full of weight" when she left home, but how "the weight persisted in [her] mind. [She] had an *alter ego* who was huge and powerful, a woman whose only morality was her own and whose loyalties were fierce and few."¹⁶¹ The chemist, whose weight as a child was reified by her mother, herself, and presumably others, established her inner identity in relation to the power that she associated with that weight, which she then countered with the powerlessness of her social identity.

Although the chemist lost the weight when she left home, she states how the persistence of the weight in her mind allowed her to call on that "patron saint... when [she] felt [her]self dwindling away through cracks in the floor or slowly fading in the street."¹⁶² While the chemist admits that this alter ego was only a fantasy, the chemist seemingly redacts this statement within the same sentence by suggesting that it was only a fantasy *in the beginning*, and, in ending the sentence with an ellipsis, the chemist implies that her fantasy became her reality. Hence, the chemist, whom Winterson portrays as housing two discordant realities and consciousnesses within her mind, found that she could "still escape" from the "common-sense approach" of time and reality by calling on her patron saint, who presumably, is the Dog-Woman.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 141-42.

¹⁶² Ibid, 142.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

The chemist reflects on how she did not need to go into pollution research, as she could have worked for the government or a university or any one of the big businesses that “continually set their in-house scientists to discredit [her] facts” about the mercury levels in the river.¹⁶⁴ When her father suggests that she should work for ICI, the chemist sardonically asks herself, “Yes, why don’t I, or Shell, or Esso, or Union Carbide, or NASA? Why don’t I take the share option and the company car and the pension scheme and the private health care and the reassuring salary? Why am I camping by a river and going mad?”¹⁶⁵ The chemist, who is angry that “[the] earth is being murdered and hardly anybody wants to believe it”¹⁶⁶ – even her own father who encourages her to work for one of the companies that she is fighting against – states that “[the] truth is [she’s] lost patience with this hypocritical stinking world.”¹⁶⁷ Hence, the chemist reveals that her qualm with the regulatory powers of the modern world is their hypocrisy and their ability to shape social intelligibility using corrupt ideologies. Repulsed by the hypocrisy of the modern world, the chemist states that she “can’t take it any more. [She] can’t flatter, lie, cajole or even smile very much.”¹⁶⁸

In wanting to escape from the hypocrisy of the world, “from [the] foreground that blinds [her] to whatever may be happening in the distance,” the chemist expresses a desire to be multiple, not single.¹⁶⁹ She states that “[if she has] a spirit, a soul... Its dimension will not be one of confinement but one of space. It may inhabit numerous changing decaying bodies in the future

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 143.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 142.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 144.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

and in the past.”¹⁷⁰ In this sense, the chemist’s desire for multiplicity and space expresses her empathetic concern for the well-being of others and her desire for universal inclusion. Indeed, she claims that “[it’s] one life or countless lives depending on what you want.”¹⁷¹ By juxtaposing the singularity of life with the multiplicity of lives, the chemist expresses her desire for individuals and society to embrace the notion of multiplicity in order to move away from the singularity of phallogocentrism; however, in stating that it depends on what an ambiguous “you” wants, the chemist does not discredit the notion of singularity. In this sense, the chemist embodies the notions of selflessness and heroism for her empathy, inclusivity, and open-mindedness. While she is angry at the hegemonic powers that murder the earth and its people, she simultaneously refuses to prescribe her own wants and desires onto others. However, in refusing to force her ideologies onto others and by camping beside the river alone, the singularity of the chemist’s voice has its limits and it appears as though the social and ecological change that the chemist desires will only occur when others decide to join her cause.

In considering what *she* wants, the chemist admits that “[when she’s] dreaming [she] want[s] a home and a lover and some children,” but she states that “it won’t work... [because who’d] want to live with a monster?”¹⁷² Although the chemist ostensibly expresses a desire for a heteronormative life, one in which she can live comfortably with a family and material possessions about her, she knows that she would not be able to “hide [her inner monster] for long,” as she would “break out, splitting [her] dress, throwing the dishes at the milkman if he

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

leered at [her] and said, ‘Hello, darling.’”¹⁷³ When the chemist’s father states that any man would want to marry her because she is pretty, the chemist thinks to herself: “Not if he pulled back my eyelids, not if he peeped into my ears, not if he looked down my throat with a torch, not if he listened to my heartbeat with a stethoscope. He’d run out of the room holding his head. He’d see her, the other one, lurking inside. She fits, even though she’s so big.”¹⁷⁴ Because the chemist senses “the other one lurking inside,” she knows that she can never have the heteronormative life that she sometimes dreams about, as that life would clash with her (very established) inner identity and would be a hypocritical life.¹⁷⁵

Thinking about her relationships with the opposite sex, the chemist states that “[she] had sex with a man once: in out in out. A soundtrack of grunts and a big sigh at the end.”¹⁷⁶ Not getting any satisfaction out of the experience, the chemist later told the man that “[she’d] like to swallow [him],” and, the man, apparently excited about her statement, asks, “[adventurous], eh?”¹⁷⁷ The chemist clarifies that she wants to swallow him whole, “every single bit, straight down the throat like an oyster, your feet last, your feet waving in my mouth like a diver’s flippers. Jonah and the Whale.”¹⁷⁸ Although the chemist’s unsettling yet comedic reference to cannibalism after her only and unsatisfying sexual encounter evokes her misandry, the chemist states that “[she doesn’t] hate men, [she] just wish[es] they’d try harder. They all want to be heroes and all we want is for them to stay at home and help with the housework and the kids.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 145.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

That's not the kind of heroism they enjoy."¹⁷⁹ In this sense, the chemist appears to associate the limited interests created by masculine ideals with the reductive powers of phallogocentrism, and, wanting to disassociate herself from the hypocrisies of reductivism, the chemist expresses a wish to transcend traditional gender roles.

Because the chemist associates traditional gender roles and contemporary lifestyles with the reiteration of corrupt ideologies detrimental to individuals and the Earth, her reference to cannibalism expresses her desire to re-signify the consumerist and singular mentalities that dictate modern life. Indeed, when the chemist's mother tells her that she's "so negative," the chemist retorts: "No I'm not, you are. You're the one who sits and watches the news and eats your factory-farmed meat and your battery eggs and chucks your endless stream of plastic into the gouged out craters in the countryside. Where do you think all that rubbish goes?"¹⁸⁰ Hence, the chemist's reference to cannibalism, as opposed to producing the "endless stream of plastic" waste, alludes to the production of a more natural and organic waste, and in this sense, to the notion of abjection for the bodily fluids it brings to mind.¹⁸¹ The chemist, who has set out to wage war against the hypocrisy of heteronormative and phallogocentric power structures and demonstrates a desire to renounce their prescriptive tendencies for the notions of universality and multiplicity, nevertheless accepts the interdependence between *the reality of the world* and the "rich imaginings" of individuals.¹⁸² In other words, although the chemist can accept that the

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

reality of the modern world is destroying the Earth, she believes that the “rich imaginings” of individuals may be able to alter that reality nonetheless.¹⁸³

In nearing the end of her narrative, the chemist contemplates a recurring memory from her childhood. As she was walking home from school during a normal afternoon in the city, she remembers how “as [she] concentrated the screeching cars and the thudding people and the smells of rubber and exhaust receded...[and how she] felt [she] was alone on a different afternoon.”¹⁸⁴ The chemist describes how the modern scene that she witnessed was replaced with “rickety vegetable boats and women arguing with one another and a regiment on horseback crossing the Thames.”¹⁸⁵ For a moment, the chemist slips into the Dog-Woman’s consciousness, as she states that “[she] had to get on to Blackfriars, there was someone waiting for [her],” but when she asks herself, “[who?] Who,” she slips back into the consciousness of the chemist and asks herself: “Why does that day return and return as I sit by a rotting river with only the fire for company?”¹⁸⁶ In this sense, the chemist, who is aware of her inner identity as the Dog-Woman as she calls on that “patron saint” whenever she begins to feel herself dwindling, is a self-reflexive character that uses her inner identity as a means of escape from the normalizing and destructive powers of modernity, heteronormativity, and phallogocentrism.¹⁸⁷

Although the chemist is simultaneously aware of her inner identity as the Dog-Woman and her social identity as the chemist, Winterson portrays the chemist as not having complete

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 146.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 142.

control over her inner identity, as the Dog-Woman commonly threatens to overtake the chemist's reality. In her isolation from the rest of society, the chemist states that "[her] strongest instinct is to abandon the common-sense approach and accept what is actually happening to [her]."¹⁸⁸ Although the chemist makes this comment about time and her sense "that time has slowed down," it is clear that she has abandoned other "common-sense approach[es]" to reality by choosing to camp beside the rotting river.¹⁸⁹ Winterson further emphasizes the idea that the Dog-Woman threatens to overtake the chemist's reality by giving the Dog-Woman more narratives than the chemist throughout the text. Hence, the chemist, who has no one to talk to, has abandoned the common-sense approach to reality and commonly finds herself slipping into her inner world where she attempts to work out her frustrations.

In the Dog-Woman's opening narrative, she states: "I had a name but I have forgotten it. They call me the Dog-Woman and it will do."¹⁹⁰ By opening her narrative with a statement about how she has forgotten her original name and that the name "Dog-Woman" will do, Winterson invokes the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and signified as the Dog-Woman's decision to carry on with her life and new name demonstrates how the notions of abjection and re-signification do not result in the subject's disintegration. By offhandedly accepting the name she has acquired from others, the Dog-Woman shows how the process of naming and re-naming is a natural phenomenon that does not lead to social unintelligibility, but that it is an arbitrary practice that constantly takes place as subjects are compelled to create meaning when confronted with the unknown or unnamed.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 143.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 3.

However, in this same narrative section, the Dog-Woman likewise intimates that the process of naming is important when she reflects on her decision to name Jordan after a river. She states that she “wanted to give him a river name, a name not bound to anything, just as the waters aren’t bound to anything.”¹⁹¹ Upon retrospection, she considers how her decision to name Jordan after a flowing body of water led to his wanderlust, and she laments naming him after a river, stating that “[she] should have named him after a stagnant pond and then [she] could have kept him, but [she] named him after a river and in the flood-tide he slipped away.”¹⁹² Hence, in the Dog-Woman’s opening narrative, Winterson simultaneously poses two discordant ideas: the process of naming is arbitrary and the process of naming becomes formative of reality and identity.

The Dog-Woman, who likens herself to a “hill of dung” and states that she wears the same clothing for five years, depicts herself as grotesque and socially repulsive.¹⁹³ The Dog-Woman’s name further substantiates this notion, as Winterson’s decision to hyphenate the words “dog” and “woman” suggests that the Dog-Woman is abject – monstrous – as she is simultaneously compared to a dog and a woman. Although the Dog-Woman has not yet described her gigantic dimensions, she gives hints to her monstrous proportions – and personality for that matter – when she declares that “there’s no man who’s a match for [her]” and when she aggressively smothers Thomas Johnson in the dress she hasn’t had off for five years, which she does when he refuses to show her the first banana that has been brought to England without

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 3-4.

¹⁹² Ibid, 4.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 4.

payment.¹⁹⁴ The Dog-Woman, refusing to pay to see “the great rarity,” uncovers the banana herself and states that the object “resembled nothing more than the private parts of an Oriental.”¹⁹⁵

Gary Krist argues that the banana, which is the image Winterson uses to indicate that the chemist’s and the Dog-Woman’s narratives are about to begin, “challenge[s] the Londoners’ notions of what a fruit should be,”¹⁹⁶ as the crowd engaged in “unanimous retching” upon its unveiling.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, Krist suggests that by using the banana as a narrative cue for her female protagonists, Winterson is able to “[explore] the alternatives that exist between the rigid borders of the accepted.”¹⁹⁸ Because the crowd is immediately repulsed by the banana, Winterson uses the banana as a symbol in order to emphasize the notion of abjection, and, as Paul Kintzele states, to highlight “the confrontation between a social order and its beyond; [the banana] establishes the presence of a force that calls the norm into question.”¹⁹⁹ However, by using the banana as a narrative cue for the Dog-Woman, Winterson also displays how this moment became formative of the Dog-Woman’s identity and reinstated her already abject and phallic characteristics.

Yet, in depicting the Dog-Woman as monstrous and phallic and non-normative, Winterson also depicts her as embodying the heteronormative characteristic of maternalism for

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 5.

¹⁹⁶ Gary Krist, “Innovation without Tears,” *The Hudson Review* 43, no. 4 (1991): 696.

¹⁹⁷ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989), 6.

¹⁹⁸ Gary Krist, “Innovation without Tears,” *The Hudson Review* 43, no. 4 (1991): 696.

¹⁹⁹ Paul Kintzele, “Gender in Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry*,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 12, no. 3 (2010): 3.

the care and gentleness that she shows to Jordan. In her article “Feminist Poetics and Politics in *Sexing the Cherry*,” Elizabeth Langland argues that

The Dog-Woman’s performance of gendered traits of tenderness, charity, and the maternal reveals the extent to which those things seen as inherent to woman and to femininity are produced within a cultural context that scripts behavioral norms out of relative body size, mass, and strength. Put another way, the anatomically huge physical body that readily cites gender norms of tenderness or charity or maternity while threatening or performing mayhem destabilizes the conventional meanings of those terms and exposes their cultural construction.²⁰⁰

In other words, Langland asserts that because the Dog-Woman commonly cites gender norms while nevertheless destabilizing or *displacing* them through her *actions*, the way in which Winterson chooses to portray the Dog-Woman reveals how heteronormative notions of gender are naturalized social constructs and not natural phenomena in and of themselves. Hence, the confusion of gender that the Dog-Woman embodies further substantiates the idea that the Dog-Woman is a transgendered character. At the same time, it indicates that the regulatory powers of social norms become formative of subjects who then have the power to reinvent those norms.

When the Dog-Woman first finds Jordan by the river, the Dog-Woman simultaneously reiterates the normative notions of maternalism and destabilizes those notions through her overprotective and violent fantasies. The Dog-Woman recalls how she was not able to ascertain

²⁰⁰ Elizabeth Langland, “Feminist Poetics and Politics in *Sexing the Cherry*,” *Narrative* 5, no. 1 (1997): 102.

Jordan's sex when she first found him because he was caked in mud. She describes how she had her tiny, witch of a neighbor help her wash Jordan, and that as she tried to "soften his coating with a sponge of hot water" in order to avoid irritating his skin, that her neighbor picked bits of mud from him as one would do "from a dog that's been hunting."²⁰¹ As they clean Jordan, her neighbor listens to Jordan's heart and makes two predictions: that Jordan will make the Dog-Woman love him and then break her heart, and that "many will want [Jordan's] heart but none will have it. None save one and she will spurn it."²⁰² At this moment, the neighbor starts to choke on her own phlegm, and although the Dog-Woman is annoyed by her neighbor's prophecy and "could have snapped her spine like a fish-bone," she saves her from choking to death by slapping her on the back.²⁰³ Later, she thinks how she should have killed her neighbor in that moment, as killing her might "have changed [their] fate, for fate may hang on any moment and at any moment be changed."²⁰⁴ The Dog-Woman states: "I should have killed her and found us a different story."²⁰⁵

By proclaiming that the death of the neighbor could have changed the Dog-Woman's and Jordan's story, Winterson conveys that language has the ability to shape reality, stories, identities, and futures. In this sense, Winterson expresses the idea that the act of speaking or naming has the power to become a self-fulfilling prophecy, and the only way to break free from the fate that a hegemonic language creates is by killing it before it has the chance to unfold. Hence, in the Dog-Woman's first narrative, Winterson puts in place many notions that she will explore throughout

²⁰¹ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989), 7.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

the text, which range from the Dog-Woman's transgendered state to the formative and self-fulfilling nature of language. Moreover, Winterson's decision to set the Dog-Woman's narrative in the midst of the English Civil War and her decision to highlight the religious issues of that war as opposed to focusing on the promise of the more democratic rule that the Parliamentarians championed allows her to give the Dog-Woman a unique political perspective. Indeed, rather than referring to the group that opposed the rule of the King as "Parliamentarians," the Dog-Woman refers to them as "Puritans" and detests everything that they stand for because "they hated everything that was grand and fine and full of life."²⁰⁶ The Dog-Woman opposes the Puritanism overtaking England and aligns herself with the Catholic values that the King represents.

In his article, "Writing a History of Difference: Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and Angela Carter's *Wise Children*," Jeffrey Roessner states that rather than representing the war "as part of a movement toward a more democratic form of government based on civil law rather than divine authority... Winterson associates the war with the development of oppressive ideals of scientific objectivity and the sovereign individual."²⁰⁷ Roessner asserts that Winterson's treatment of the Revolution and her emphasis on grafting – a new scientific practice that Jordan performs in his job as the gardener's boy – suggests that "*Sexing the Cherry* presents a view similar to that of Michel Foucault" in his book *Discipline and Punish*.²⁰⁸ Building on these similarities, Roessner argues that "*Sexing the Cherry* depicts the Revolution as a move toward

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 22.

²⁰⁷ Jeffrey Roessner, "Writing a History of Difference: Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and Angela Carter's *Wise Children*," *College Literature* 29, no. 1 (2002): 107.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

ideals of rationality and objectivity – ideals that helped establish the value of sexual repression and the naturalness of heterosexuality.”²⁰⁹ Although a fair interpretation that substantiates Winterson’s themes on reduction versus proliferation and singularity versus multiplicity, Winterson’s focus on the religious aspects of the English Civil War further establishes the connection between the Dog-Woman and the chemist. In other words, just as the chemist expresses a desire for universal inclusivity, the Dog-Woman aligns herself with *Catholicism and catholic values*. As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, “catholic” – in non-ecclesiastical use – refers to “universal.”²¹⁰

In this sense, the chemist’s empathetic desire for universality and multiplicity and her wish to do away with the corrupt and hypocritical ideologies in the modern world have become reflected and allegorized in her inner world, wherein she uses her inner identity as the Dog-Woman to work out her frustrations with contemporary life and the hegemonic powers of heteronormativity and phallogocentrism. Hence, rather than simply opposing the naturalness of heterosexuality, Winterson highlights how the naturalness of any hegemonic concept becomes detrimental to subjects for the limitations it imposes on identity and social intelligibility. In this sense, the Dog-Woman, opposing the restrictive laws and ideologies that the Puritans are trying to implement in England, aligns herself with the universalism that catholic values promote.

Because the Dog-Woman is represented as a phallic character who is nevertheless the epitome of maternalism, her transgendered state places her outside of the regulatory powers of

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 108.

²¹⁰ "catholic, adj. and n.". OED Online. December 2016. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/28967?redirectedFrom=catholic> (accessed December 31, 2016).

heteronormativity and phallogocentrism, which enables her to single out the hypocritical, reductive, and coercive strategies that the Puritans use in their attempt to gain power. Indeed, the Dog-Woman's ability to recognize the corrupt rhetorics used by the Puritans allows her to resist the coercive tactics they use to brainwash the populace. Moreover, by realizing that language – especially a phallogocentric language – has the power to shape reality, identity, and the future, the Dog-Woman's decision to align herself with catholic values indicates that she, like her social identity, desires to displace the sedimentation of phallogocentrism, as she believes that phallogocentric rhetorics promote reductive narcissism, cannibalism, and perversity.

The text jumps ahead to 1649, at which time the Dog-Woman and Jordan, now nineteen-years old, are living in Wimbledon. The Dog-Woman states that, at first, the Civil War hardly touched them in Wimbledon, and that during this time, she missed “baiting Neighbor Firebrace,” because “[with] everyone in accord, what merriment is there?”²¹¹ Although the Dog-Woman poses this question to emphasize how boring she finds Wimbledon, Winterson also poses this question in order to underscore the mundanity that the Puritans' revisionist rule will bring about, and for that matter, the mundanity of heteronormativity and phallogocentrism for their emphasis on singularity. However, as time passes and Queen Henrietta is unable to secure allies and the Roundheads gain control of the navy, the Dog-Woman states that “[they] grew to hate what had been only a joke.”²¹²

The reality of the war reaches them, and the Dog-Woman describes how the Roundheads destroy “every place of distraction so that men and women might have nothing to occupy them

²¹¹ Ibid, 65.

²¹² Ibid.

but the invisible God.”²¹³ The Dog-Woman describes the unnecessary destruction that the war brings about, including the destruction of an altar window in a church that had long been famed for its beauty. The Dog-Woman watches as the women of the church gather the pieces of glass, and she says that they told her “with hands that bled, that they would rebuild the window in a secret place.”²¹⁴ As she watches the women pray through the broken window, she describes how the colored lights from the broken glass dance across their backs, making it look as if “they were wearing harlequin coats.”²¹⁵ As she leaves the church, the Dog-Woman states that her “head [was] full of things that cannot be destroyed.”²¹⁶

With the reality of the war upon them, the destruction that the war and the Roundheads in particular leave behind sets an ominous tone for the future. The destruction that takes place puts England in a state of abjection, and as the Roundheads gain power, the future is at risk of becoming re-signified according to their singular vision, which is a stark contrast from the universality that was allowed to exist under the Catholic rule of the King. However, because the women plan to rebuild their altar window in a secret place and because the Dog-Woman states that the Roundheads cannot destroy the things in her head, it is clear that the destruction of material things cannot easily displace the differentiated perception of Winterson’s characters. Although the Roundheads are ostensibly winning the war through the power they exert over the Cavaliers, the women who plan to rebuild their window nevertheless demonstrate their resistance to the Puritanic rule. Moreover, the Dog-Woman’s resilient thoughts illustrate the limitations of

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 66.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

the Puritans' regulatory powers. In this sense, despite the Puritans' growing influence, the characters resist the concepts that the Roundheads attempt to instill in the minds of the Kingdom. While England is on the brink of losing its former universality for the uniform lifestyles that the Roundheads want to impose on its inhabitants, Winterson shows how their attempts to rule the minds of their subjects will not be easy.

When the Dog-Woman and Jordan return to their old home that they have not visited for six years, they find that Preacher Scroggs and Neighbor Firebrace "have requisitioned [their] house for Jesus and Oliver Cromwell."²¹⁷ The Dog-Woman, furious, tells Jordan to burn their copies of "A Perfect Diurnal," and when eight Roundheads try to stop them, the Dog-Woman fights them off, killing three. She allows Preacher Scroggs and Neighbor Firebrace to live, and after they leave, she and Jordan build a fire using the copies of "A Perfect Diurnal," destroying the rhetoric that the Roundheads are trying to spread. As they warm themselves by the fire, the Dog-Woman states that "[the] very poor came and sat by it, and warmed themselves, and drank beer of [hers]."²¹⁸ The generosity and acceptance that the Dog-Woman shows to the poor are juxtaposed against the Puritans, who attempt to brainwash the citizens with pamphlets denouncing the King and his sins. The Dog-Woman, who states that "[she] would rather live with sins of excess than sins of denial," observes how the Puritans have forgotten "that we are born into flesh and in flesh must remain."²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Ibid, 68.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 70.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

Contemplating the Puritans' wish to rid England of its "sins of excess," the Dog-Woman notes that "[the Puritan] women bind their breasts and cook plain food without salt, and the men are so afraid of their member uprising that they keep it strapped between their legs with bandages."²²⁰ Although the Dog-Woman is not depicted as an extremely sexual character herself, she finds the Puritans' desire to do away with sexuality hypocritical. Moreover, the Puritans' self-denying, revisionist rule is not limited to their wish to do away with sexuality (except for procreative purposes), as their decision to wear gray clothing also expresses their desire to limit self-expression. Because the Puritans' revisionist rule will precipitate a restrictive and uniform society, the King's trial and execution foreshadows the ominous future of the seventeenth century.

After the King has been executed, Jordan sets sail with Tradescant, and the Dog-Woman stays behind in England. Alone for the first time since finding Jordan as a baby in the Thames, the Dog-Woman "carried on [her] old ways for a while," but she notes how the new Parliamentary rule and "the death of the King has put an end to the future as a place we already know. Now the future is wild and waits for us as a beast in a lair."²²¹ Resolving to resist the Puritan rule, the Dog-Woman spits on Puritans whenever they cross her path. When she is recruited by a man who urges her and a group of Royalists to avenge the King's death by upholding the "Law of Moses: 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,'" the Dog-Woman mutilates approximately sixty Puritans by collecting "119 eyeballs, one missing on account of a man who had lost one already, and over 2,000 teeth."²²² The group reconvenes a fortnight later

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid, 91.

²²² Ibid, 92-3.

and the Dog-Woman shares her trophies with the others, but discovers that the group had not intended to uphold the Law of Moses literally, as many faint and the preacher asks her to be less zealous in her efforts.

Hurt by the reprimand she has received at this misunderstanding, but still believing in her cause, the Dog-Woman “decided to continue [her] sabotage alone when [she] was approached again by the whore from Spitalfields.”²²³ The whore tells the Dog-Woman that she and the other prostitutes have been murdering the Puritans that visit their brothel and that they need help getting rid of the bodies. The Dog-Woman agrees to help the prostitute, and when she accompanies the prostitute to the brothel, she witnesses the true hypocrisy of the Puritans; although the Puritans publicly condemn sexuality except for the purposes of procreation, she watches as Puritan men engage in bestiality, orgies, and sodomy. Although the male Puritans go to the brothel in order to play out their perverse fantasies, few of the men actually engage in sexual acts with the prostitutes. In depicting the men as engaging with one another sexually – with the exception of one man who prefers to have sex with pigs – Winterson portrays the male Puritans as embodying the notions of reductive narcissism, cannibalism, and perversity, as they only desire to consume their own ideals.

The Dog-Woman recognizes Preacher Scroggs and Neighbor Firebrace, who are “wiping each other’s faces with their emissions,” and wanting revenge on them, the Dog-Woman agrees to help the prostitute as long as she is allowed to murder Preacher Scroggs and Neighbor Firebrace.²²⁴ When Preacher Scroggs and Neighbor Firebrace return to the brothel dressed in

²²³ Ibid, 93.

²²⁴ Ibid, 95.

togas in order to play out the final quarrel between Caesar and Brutus, the Dog-Woman, playing along, but also needing to disguise herself from them, dons a costume as an executioner. The Dog-Woman enters the room just as they are about to embrace one another and begins to swing her ax at them. After mutilating both of them, the Dog-Woman takes off her mask to reveal herself and then beheads them both. As the Dog-Woman leaves, she describes how “an eager crowd of good gentlemen poured in, anxious to disport themselves amongst these ruins,” and that as she “looked back [she] saw that one already had Scroggs on the remains of the bed. He was mounting him from behind, all the while furiously kissing the severed head.”²²⁵

Among the most graphically disturbing scenes depicted in literature, Winterson’s choice to portray the Puritans’ hypocrisy in the brothel and the grotesque and brutal end of Preacher Scroggs and Neighbor Firebrace in the manner that she has met critic disapproval, which is evidenced by the number of critics who have condemned *Sexing the Cherry* as androphobic. Yet, in following her themes about singularity versus multiplicity, the prophetic nature of language, and the detrimental effects that the sedimentation of hegemonic norms has on her characters, Winterson’s decision to portray a scene from which a Quentin Tarantino film might shy away shows how it is only through allegory that she can emphasize the deleterious effects of the hegemonic ideals that stem from heteronormativity and phallogocentrism. By using the male Puritans to stand for phallogocentrism, Winterson risks problematizing her text because this scene does connote androphobic concepts; however, the scene merits an unbiased analysis in relation to the text as a whole and in regards to the chemist’s and Dog-Woman’s narratives.

²²⁵ Ibid, 98.

Because the chemist and the Dog-Woman represent the notions of universality and selflessness and because both are set against the corrupt ideologies that have permeated their respective realities, Winterson uses the male Puritans allegorically in order to demonstrate how the notions of heteronormativity and phallogocentrism are a form of reductive narcissism, which she further portrays as cannibalistic and perverse. Hence, rather than condemning male homosexuality as Roessner argues, Winterson uses the male Puritans to demonstrate how singular and hegemonic concepts breed perversity. In other words, because the Puritans wish to reduce the world in order to fit the world to their ideals and because they engage in hypocritical and perverse sexual acts with each other – demonstrating their desire to only consume their own ideas or ideologies – Winterson uses this scene to illustrate how the sedimentation and reiteration of hegemonic ideals become a type of cannibalism. Although she does not go so far as to have the Puritans literally eat the remains of Preacher Scroggs and Neighbor Firebrace, but only has the Puritans engage in necrophiliac acts with their bodies, this scene – the epitome of abjection – nevertheless imparts that the imposition of a singular reality on individuals is perverse and detrimental to humanity as a whole.

However, the Dog-Woman is a projection of the chemist, and for that matter, her inner identity. Because the Dog-Woman is not a real character on her own and is simply a part of the chemist, the aforementioned scene does not actually occur in the realistic realm of the text, but in the “rich imaginings” of the chemist as she sits by the rotting river.²²⁶ In this sense, the chemist, who is depressed and horribly lonely, works out her frustration in her imagination over the businesses allowed to pollute the earth due to their status and power in the world. Indeed,

²²⁶ Ibid, 145.

because the corporations against which she is fighting have their own in-house scientists whose sole purpose is to discredit any of the companies' wrongdoings, Winterson portrays the corporations' phallogocentric power as reductive, narcissistic, and cannibalistic because they deny all realities that challenge their own in an attempt to preserve their power. Moreover, the prophetic nature of language and its tendency to shape reality and identity are likewise suggested through the manners in which the corporations disprove the findings of other scientists, as, by exercising their prominence in the world, the corporations convince governments and the general population that the scientific findings that put them in a bad light are not true. In this sense, the general population remains oblivious to the harms these companies inflict and simply carries on with their consumerist lifestyles.

After the scene at the brothel, the Dog-Woman resolves not to kill again. Shortly after, Jordan returns with the first pineapple in England, the Dog-Woman mentions that England has restored the monarchy with the return of King Charles II. In describing how justice was finally brought onto the men that executed King Charles I, the Dog-Woman states how “[it] did render [her] philosophical, though, to sit at Tyburn and watch the merriment and the great wonder of passers-by, especially small children, who had never thought what it might mean to rot.”²²⁷ By juxtaposing the rotting bodies of the King's accusers with the liveliness of the children, Winterson implies that ideology and power is ephemeral and that future generations can nevertheless re-conceptualize and re-signify the world. However, shortly after Jordan returns, there is an outbreak of the plague and England is consumed by death. The Dog-Woman believes that the plague is a sign that “God's judgement on the murder of the King has befallen [them],”

²²⁷ Ibid, 118.

but she helps the carters remove the bodies from the city and carries the body of her friend into the communal grave herself.²²⁸ After the plague ends in 1665, the Dog-Woman describes how she could not eliminate the stench of the plague and that she began to associate London with “filth and pestilence.”²²⁹ The Dog-Woman whispers to herself that “[this] city should be burned down,” and in Nicholas Jordan’s narrative that follows, the chemist states, “Let’s burn it... Let’s burn down the factory.”²³⁰

In the Dog-Woman’s following narrative, she describes how “a fire broke out in a baker’s yard,” which quickly spreads and becomes what is now known as the Great Fire of London.²³¹ The Dog-Woman states that she did not start the fire, but that she might have helped encourage it by pouring oil onto the flames. Although Nicolas Jordan’s and the chemist’s narratives stop after the chemist proposes that they burn down the factory, by depicting the outbreak of the Great Fire of London immediately after the chemist’s proposal, Winterson gives her audience good reason to believe that the chemist and Nicolas set fire to the factory. Because the chemist’s attempts to raise public and governmental awareness about the mercury levels in the river have been in vain, Winterson proposes that it is only through the complete destruction of the factory that the chemist can finally achieve her political agenda. Indeed, Winterson suggests that only through the act of burning down the factory will the chemist put the factory into a state of abjection, and that it is only when the factory and its phallogocentric propaganda have been destroyed that new concepts and other truths can emerge.

²²⁸ Ibid, 159.

²²⁹ Ibid, 163.

²³⁰ Ibid, 164-5.

²³¹ Ibid, 165.

However, by not showing what happens to the chemist and Nicolas Jordan after the chemist suggests that they burn down the factory, and for that matter, by only alluding to the idea that the factory burns down in the twentieth century, Winterson ends the novel on a note of uncertainty. Although the act of burning down the factory would suggest that the chemist finally achieved her political agenda, that act would also be a punishable offense. While the chemist states that she feels as though she is going mad – which is further emphasized through her prolonged existence as the Dog-Woman in her inner world – she is also portrayed as a pragmatic character. In this sense, it is hard to imagine whether the act of burning down the factory would actually be characteristic of the chemist at the end of the novel – who has formerly used fact sheets to raise public awareness – and it is likewise hard to imagine Nicolas Jordan assisting her in such an extreme political act. At the same time, by stating that “ordinary people [like the chemist] have to go too far” when people are apathetic, Winterson simultaneously suggests that the chemist, in already having been made to go too far, might have gone further.²³²

By leaving the ending ambiguous – but nevertheless on a note of abjection – Winterson does not only open *Sexing the Cherry* to interpretation, but also to speculation; in other words, she allows her audience to write their own end to the novel. By refusing to end the novel on a note of certainty, and by destabilizing her audience throughout the novel through her use of the split narrative, Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry* does not simply advocate for the displacement of the sedimentation of phallogocentrism, but actively demonstrates the practice of it. By allegorizing phallogocentrism through the corporation’s tactics and the Puritans’ hypocritical rhetoric, Winterson rewrites the reductive narcissism of phallogocentrism as cannibalistic and

²³² Ibid, 140.

perverse for the singularity of its vision. By comparing the ideas presented in *Sexing the Cherry* to Walter Benjamin's materialist historiography, Angela Smith claims:

Any ascription to the totalitarian mode of historical narrative, to linear and finite understandings of time, and to a single "true" reality makes it possible to merely exist in the present without any awareness of responsibility to the past...

Winterson's characters thus reconceptualize their historical existence, and, acknowledging their responsibility, act revolutionarily: the woman, now a chemist, conducts a "one-woman campaign" against the pollution in rivers (Winterson 1989, 140), and Nicolas Jordan is inspired to join her.²³³

In destabilizing the audience through the characters she represents, the form she adopts, and the ideas she poses about heteronormativity and phallogocentrism, Winterson demands that her audience be critical of the power structures she represents in her novel. However, building on Smith's interpretation, Winterson also urges her *audience* to question the power structures that have historically dictated a singular "reality" and "truth" in order to consider the ways in which socially- and historically-constructed sedimentations are currently presiding over her audience, and perhaps, in order to encourage her audience to act revolutionarily.

Although Winterson does not show the twentieth-century characters burn down the factory, she nevertheless suggests that the sedimentation of phallogocentrism – that is, the corporation's rhetoric – will be displaced in the novel's future, as the notion of a singular reality

²³³ Angela Marie Smith, "Fiery Constellations: Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and Benjamin's Materialist Historiography," *College Literature* 32, no. 3 (2005): 30.

is simply “a fake,” and ostensibly, easily displaced.²³⁴ Indeed, Nicolas’ decision to join the chemist at the end of the novel indicates that through the collective effort of individual characters and their differentiated perceptions, hegemonic concepts can finally become displaced. By allegorizing the singularity of the corporation’s rhetoric through the male Puritans of the seventeenth century, Winterson emphasizes the damaging effects created by unquestioned norms and unchecked practices. Yet, in highlighting the malleability of social intelligibility through her emphasis on the differentiated perception of subjects, abjection, re-signification, and the arbitrariness of language in general, Winterson also leaves her audience with a sense of hope for the future.

²³⁴ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989), 167.

Chapter Four
**Bringing ‘Home’ the Inner Identity: Transgendering the Body through Grafting
in Jeanette Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry***

As your lover describes you, so you are. – Jess in Jeanette Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry*

Commonly distinguished by its exploration into gender, Jeanette Winterson’s fiction regularly challenges heteronormativity while it simultaneously works to dismantle the notions of phallogocentrism. Winterson’s 1993 book, *Written on the Body*, is a prime example of her wish to free her characters from normative gender identities, as she refuses to disclose the gender of her first-person narrator throughout the nearly two-hundred-page novel. Winterson’s decision to deny gender in *Written on the Body* and to embrace the expository form of the first-person narrator suggests that, as Paul Kintzele states, “For Winterson, gender is a narrative.”²³⁵ Indeed, Winterson’s partiality for first-person narration can be seen throughout her work, and her devotion to this narrative technique shows how Winterson believes that it is individual experience – and not merely the regulatory powers of language and society – that defines the human subject. Although Winterson’s blatant denial of normative genders is less pronounced in her earlier book, *Sexing the Cherry*, she nevertheless uses first-person narration in order to destabilize heteronormative notions as her characters attempt to define themselves outside of the regulatory powers that are imposed on them.

In using first-person narration throughout her work, Winterson demonstrates an attempt to narrativize and accredit the inner lives of her characters, and, in *Sexing the Cherry*, she goes one step further by giving the majority of the narratives to the inner identities – Jordan and the

²³⁵ Paul Kintzele, “Gender in Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry*,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 12, no. 3 (2010): 5.

Dog-Woman – of the more realistic characters Nicolas Jordan and the chemist. Although Winterson portrays the chemist as a relatively self-reflexive character aware of her inner identity as the Dog-Woman, she depicts Nicolas Jordan as a character who does not know his inner self, and is, as a result, aimless and self-doubting. By depicting the ways in which Nicolas' friend, Jack, tries to coerce him into a heteronormative lifestyle and how Nicolas' meticulous parents become easily annoyed by his idiosyncrasies, Winterson portrays Nicolas' lack of self-knowledge as making him an easy target to the regulatory powers that try to make him conform to a masculine existence. However, in discerning a breach between the phallogocentric representations of language and how he experiences his reality, Nicolas Jordan does not succumb to the coercive powers that attempt to make him conform, but sets off on an inner journey in an attempt to self-author himself and his lived experience.

Although Winterson opens the novel with Jordan's narrative, the text as a whole defies linearity, and, throughout the text, Winterson provides plenty of evidence that her characters' narratives are simultaneously taking place. Indeed, when Jordan contemplates the notion of time, he states that "Thinking about time is like turning the globe round and round, recognizing that all journeys exist simultaneously, that to be in one place is not to deny the existence of another, even though that other place cannot be felt or seen, our usual criteria for belief."²³⁶ Winterson further substantiates these notions of reality versus fantasy and fragmentation versus fluidity when she portrays two different scenes in which seventeenth-century Jordan and nineteenth-century Nicolas bleed into one character: the event is first described during Jordan's narrative, and, later in the novel, Nicolas describes the event as it happens to him while working on board an

²³⁶ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989), 99.

admiralty tug. Both of these scenes depict Nicolas transposing into his inner identity, Jordan, wherein he finds himself in the somewhat freer society of the seventeenth century, but which is nevertheless on the brink of losing its former universality as the scientific objectivity of the Industrial Revolution begins to take root. Although the seventeenth century ostensibly offers its inhabitants more freedom than the twentieth century, Jordan senses the coercive and restrictive regulations that the Puritans are trying to impose in England, and he expresses a desire similar to Nicolas when he resolves to find his “fleet-footed self.”²³⁷ Hence, rather than demonstrating self-knowledge as the inner identity, Jordan, like Nicolas, decides to set off on a journey in his inner world, where he imagines that words are more real than gravity and where he dresses as a woman in order “to be free of the burdens of [his] gender.”²³⁸

Hence, Winterson’s portrayal of the fragmented Nicolas/Jordan indicates that the coercive powers of heteronormativity and phallogocentrism have completely stripped him of his essential self and agency. Winterson further emphasizes this notion when she describes Nicolas as a Naval Cadet who dislikes the notion of a crew, as “they were just slaves of the ship.”²³⁹ Because Nicolas thinks that the idea of an enslaved interiority is unsavory, his distaste for enslaved crews indicates that his inner identity, Jordan, may be imprisoned. Jordan’s determination to find his inner self supports the idea that he, too, feels the need to escape in order to discover a version of himself that is free from the regulatory powers of society. However, Winterson’s decision to represent Jordan as an early explorer and as a botanist who practices the art of grafting indicates that Jordan’s skills in exploration and grafting will allow Nicolas/Jordan to not only find and free

²³⁷ Ibid, 87.

²³⁸ Ibid, 28.

²³⁹ Ibid, 129.

his essential self, but also to become “grafted on to something better and stronger.”²⁴⁰ By depicting Jordan as practicing the art of grafting and Nicolas-the-Naval-Cadet as associating crews with slavery, Winterson’s text resonates with the notions put forth by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, as she portrays a clear and direct correlation between the scientific objectivity of the seventeenth century and the imprisoned body of the twentieth century.

By placing Jordan and Nicolas in the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, Winterson quite literally illustrates how Foucault’s claim that the “history of the present” has created “the imprisoned man, who is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself.”²⁴¹ Because Nicolas *and* his inner identity, Jordan, set out in an attempt to find their inner selves, Winterson depicts Nicolas/Jordan as the self-imprisoned man that Michel Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish*. The motifs of imprisonment and impotence in Nicolas’ narratives are not only emphasized by his anxiety about the enslavement of crews, but also about the programmability of computers, the coercions from society, and the disconnections between reality, language, and individualized experience. Although the underlying themes that connect Nicolas’ anxieties are tied to modernity, heteronormativity, phallogocentrism, and masculinity, it is Jordan who explicitly expresses his discontent with the regulatory powers of these ideologies, which becomes apparent when Jordan dresses as a woman in order to free himself from masculinity and when he fantasizes about the brutal ways in which Fortunata’s eleven sisters dispose of their husbands.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 87.

²⁴¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), 30.

Although Winterson's omission of modernism expresses her desire to do away with the imprisonment of the regulatory powers that the seventeenth century brought about, her motif of grafting and her title – *Sexing the Cherry* – also indicates that the subjects who have become imprisoned by the sedimentation of phallogocentric and modernist ideals can nevertheless find freedom by becoming transgendered through their inner identities. Hence, Jordan's quest to find the dancing part of himself is a quest to find his feminine identity, Fortunata. Indeed, Winterson explores this idea throughout Nicolas/Jordan's journey, as, it is only after Jordan has cited femininity and grafted a part of Fortunata onto himself that he can finally become transgendered and "brought home" to Nicolas in the social domain.²⁴² Nicolas/Jordan acquires the self-knowledge he has been seeking by becoming a transgendered subject at the end of *Sexing the Cherry*. Hence, Winterson shows only after Nicolas/Jordan has become transgendered and acquired self-knowledge will he be able to displace phallogocentrism and help the chemist/Dog-Woman re-signify "the future."²⁴³

After a significant portion of the text has unfolded, Nicolas Jordan begins his narrative with a description of a painting titled "Mr Rose, the Royal Gardener, presents the pineapple to Charles the Second," and explains that shortly after seeing this painting, he decided to join the Navy and "[three] things coincided."²⁴⁴ Nicolas states that the first of these "three things" occurred when he saw this painting and "tried to imagine what it would be like to bring something home for the first time."²⁴⁵ He tells a story about buying a pineapple and keeping it in

²⁴² Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989), 116.

²⁴³ *Ibid*, 167.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 127.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

his room for a long time, injecting preservatives into it and taking it out at night to look at it and sometimes even sleeping with it. He explains how his mother, with her discerning nose, would comment on the fruity smell in his room and how on the days that he slept with it, “she complained [he] smelled of fruit.”²⁴⁶ Nicolas’ father asks, “How can the boy smell of fruit?” and Nicolas explains how “[his] mother has often been labelled as strange but that’s because she says things people can’t possibly believe. Mostly she’s right.”²⁴⁷

In stating that the strange things that his mother says are usually “right,” Nicolas appears to suspect a breach between reality and the representation offered by language. In order to adhere to the rigid association that is supposed to exist between reality and language, Nicolas Jordan provides a description of himself as others see him:

Nicolas Jordan. Five foot ten. Dark. Makes model boats and sails them at the weekend. Best friend Jack. No brothers or sisters. Parents can’t afford a telescope. Has a book instead on how to navigate by the stars, and a pair of binoculars on a khaki strap. That’s all there is to say about me. On the outside, anyway.²⁴⁸

Although Nicolas can describe himself as others perceive him, by suggesting that there may be more to say about him on the *inside*, Nicolas implies that this is not an adequate description of his identity. In her article “Multiple Selves and Grafted Agents: A Postmodernist Reading of *Sexing the Cherry*,” Bente Gade states that *Sexing the Cherry* demonstrates how “identity is restricted by conventional forms of representation that exclude important aspects of individual

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 128.

experiences.”²⁴⁹ Gade’s apt observation is precisely what Nicolas suggests about his own experiences in relation to reality and identity. Indeed, Nicolas goes on to tell about the “second of the three things” that coincided, wherein he bought a book called “*The Observer’s Book of Ships*,” with a frontispiece that read “By Frank E. Dodman forwarded by A.C. Hardy BSc, MINA, FRGS.”²⁵⁰ Nicolas states, “For a long time I had a secret lover called Mina Frogs. When I came home a hero she was always waiting at the docks and desperate to marry me.”²⁵¹ In admitting that he had a secret lover who did not actually exist, Nicolas suggests that his inner life is just as substantial as his outer life, and perhaps, even more so.

Nicolas explains how he “loved that book, describing over a hundred types of ships with ninety-five line drawings, sixteen colour plates and sixteen pages of photographs.”²⁵² He describes how it inspired him to begin building his own model ships, first from kits that included plastic seamen, and then how he later learned to design his own ships from scratch. Nicolas states that he “never bothered with a crew. The crew weren’t beautiful, they were just slaves of the ship,”²⁵³ echoing Foucault’s claim that “[the] soul is the prison of the body.”²⁵⁴ Because Foucault’s theory postulates that the body is constructed from the outside, wherein the body then constructs the interiority that comes to imprison its external actions, Nicolas’ belief that the crew are slaves of the ship reiterates Foucault’s notion of self-imprisonment, as the crew is formed

²⁴⁹ Bente Gade, “Multiple Selves and Grafted Agents: A Postmodernist Reading of *Sexing the Cherry*,” in *Sponsored by Demons: The Art of Jeanette Winterson*, ed. Marianne Bengtson, Marianne Børch, and Cindie Maagaard (Copenhagen: Scholar’s Press, 1999), 27.

²⁵⁰ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989), 128.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), 136.

according to the ship's needs and is also the regulating force of the ship. Nicolas' reference to an enslaved crew indicates that he can empathize with the notion of imprisonment. Moreover, Nicolas' reference to the notion of imprisonment further stresses the idea that he desires to be free from the coerced constructions of society.

However, as Nicolas continues his narrative, he introduces his friend, Jack, whom he describes as "very clean," and a lover of computers because they're "so clean, so programmable."²⁵⁵ When Nicolas tells Jack that he has learned to navigate by the stars and Jack asks, "What for," Nicolas explains that Jack "isn't insensitive, he's just modern."²⁵⁶ This scene in which Nicolas attributes Jack's abrasive personality to modernity highlights an interesting juxtaposition between the two characters. Whereas Nicolas reveals an anxiety over the idea of an enslaved *interiority*, Jack shows an affinity for computers and all things clean and programmable. Jack's inclination for computers and programmable devices evokes the image of the soldier's docile body that Michel Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish*. In this sense, Jack appears to be the epitome of heteronormativity, phallogocentrism, masculinity, and modernity for adhering to the privileged mode of existence in the social domain as a constructed subject.

Indeed, in one of Nicolas' later narratives, the value Jack places on his social construction becomes more evident when he attempts to "help" Nicolas by scolding him for "never think[ing] about [his] future."²⁵⁷ Jack warns Nicolas that if he doesn't start to think about his future, "[he'll]

²⁵⁵ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989), 130.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 156.

turn into a loser.”²⁵⁸ Because Jack attempts to police Nicolas’ actions and decisions, Winterson personifies the coercive forces of society through the ways in which she characterizes Jack. Nicolas explains to Jack that he has thought about sailing around the world, and Jack, interested, asks Nicolas if he’ll break a record. When Nicolas admits that he doesn’t know, Jack becomes aggravated and goes on a rant: ““See what I mean? Even when you have a chance to do something useful you don’t. What’s the point of sailing round the bloody world if you’re not going to break a record? You could go round the world in a plane if that’s all you want.””²⁵⁹ Jack’s obliviousness to the notion of sailing around the world for the sake of enjoyment illustrates how he lacks the rich interiority that Nicolas – although he doubts it – has. Nicolas replies that he wants to sail around the world, because “[planes] make you think the world’s solid.”²⁶⁰ Nicolas’ comment betrays his belief about the variable nature of the world and reality, which further distinguishes him from Jack’s lack of depth. Jack’s retort substantiates the idea that he sees the world in a much more dualistic way than Nicolas, as “[he] think[s] the world’s divided into two sorts of people. Those who do and those who won’t do.””²⁶¹

The scene in which Jack attempts to coerce Nicolas into someone who is not “a loser” and into someone who is socially recognizable suggests that Nicolas’ dreamlike and lackadaisical existence “won’t do” in the modern world that values “progress and industry and the free market.”²⁶² Moreover, Jack’s own success in the world demonstrates how the twentieth century places value on the individual who has an aggressive and assertive and self-assured social

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 157.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

identity.²⁶³ Jack explains that Nicolas can't make a career out of a hobby, and Nicolas, seemingly seething at this comment, thinks "*And you? And you,*" echoing Caesar in the moment of betrayal.²⁶⁴ Jack's insistence that the world is divided into two types of people, those who "join the world" and contribute to "progress" and those who "[hold] up progress and industry and the free market," demonstrates the dichotomous and reductive modes of thinking that surrounds Nicolas as he attempts to reason with Jack.²⁶⁵

Nicolas notes that Jack doesn't hear him say "[all] rivers run into the sea" when he tries to defend the chemist's political campaign about the mercury levels in the river.²⁶⁶ The fact that Jack doesn't hear Nicolas' Buddha-esque comment suggests that Jack can only hear, and thus, understand, that which makes sense to him. Nicolas, who, for Jack, represents the unrepresentable and the class "who won't do," cannot be *heard* by Jack, as Jack can only make sense of the "people who do." In this way, Winterson portrays the progress – and hence, the phallogocentric heteronormativity – that Jack stands for as not only dichotomous and reductive, but also as narcissistic since Jack can only hear the echoes of others that share his single-minded view of the world. Because Jack can only see the world in black and white – or according to "doing" and "not doing" – Nicolas, who has a more relativistic perspective about the world and who does not place value on measurable accomplishments, struggles to relate to others. Moreover, Winterson's decision to have Jack typify modernity – and for that matter the *norm* – further emphasizes Nicolas' alienation in the world.

²⁶³ Ibid, 158.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 157.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 158.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

Nicolas' difficulty relating to others is not only exemplified through his interactions with Jack, as Jack is not the only narrow-minded character who attempts to change Nicolas. Indeed, Nicolas' parents are portrayed as a stereotypically heteronormative and rather myopic couple: his father is distant and watches films that idealize masculinity, while Nicolas' mother is petty and nosy. Although their attempts to dictate Nicolas' decisions are less severe than Jack's, they also attempt to micromanage Nicolas about fairly insignificant aspects of his life. This tendency becomes apparent when Nicolas describes his parents' eating habits as he states, "[my] mother and father are very tidy eaters. They arrange their food according to colour and shape and eat proportionally so that they never have too much of one thing and too little of another. I eat all of my peas first and this annoys them."²⁶⁷ On the night before Nicolas leaves for the Navy, he describes how he "tried to leave [his] peas till last" in order to avoid annoying his parents who were ostensibly on edge about his departure.²⁶⁸ Because Nicolas is surrounded by heteronormative characters with whom he has difficulty identifying and communicating and who are constantly trying to control his actions and decisions, it appears as though Nicolas will only be able to free himself from their coercions by leaving home and defining himself.

Nicolas' states that the "third thing" that coincided with his decision to join the Navy occurred when he was preparing to leave for the Navy. Here, Winterson plays with the notion of time and Jordan's theory about journeys that are simultaneously taking place. As Nicolas was cleaning out his room before his departure, he came across a book that he loved as a child, in which he "remembered so vividly that it came to [him] not as a thought but as a taste in the

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 134.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, 135.

mouth.”²⁶⁹ The reference to synesthesia here seems important, as it further substantiates the idea that language cannot always portray an accurate representation of reality or individual experience, and as it highlights Nicolas’ alternative existence by showing how he does not experience the world in a normal way. The book, called “*The Boys’ Book of Heroes*,” was something Nicolas read when he was around ten years old and he states that “it was [his] précis of heroes.”²⁷⁰ After describing his favorite heroes, Nicolas states:

If you’re a hero you can be an idiot, behave badly, ruin your personal life, have any number of mistresses and talk about yourself all the time, and nobody minds. Heroes are immune. They have wide shoulders and plenty of hair and wherever they go a crowd gathers. Mostly they enjoy the company of other men, although attractive women are part of their reward.²⁷¹

Nicolas’ desire to be a hero, to be immune from the societal norms that press in upon him, epitomizes his desire for escape, self-discovery, and transcendence, at the same time that it depicts his nostalgia for a heroism from a bygone time.

Although Nicolas’ favorite heroes as a boy were “idiot[s], behave[d] badly, [and] ruin[ed] [their] personal [lives],” upon finding this book, Nicolas considers what constitutes a hero and his nostalgia for a former version of masculine heroism quickly dissipates. In describing the various film genres that his father watches – all of which celebrate male homosociality and explore different types of masculine heroes – he claims that space films are different because

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 131.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid, 133.

...they're the only area of undiminished hope. They're happy and they have women in them who are sometimes scientists rather than singers or waitresses. Sometimes the women get to be heroes too, though this is still not as popular. When I watch space films I always want to cry because they leave you with so much to hope for, it feels like a beginning, not a tired old end.²⁷²

Because Nicolas prefers space films for their originality and depiction of female heroism, his pall with masculinity, phallogocentrism, heteronormativity, and modernity becomes apparent. Weary of the mundanity of the world, wherein his perceptive mother and his aloof father are critical of his most trivial quirks and his best friend constantly goads him to develop measurable aspirations, Nicolas longs for his own beginning. Yet, in noting that people will soon have been everywhere and that, as Gade observes, “the project of mapping and categorising... is almost completed,” Nicolas wonders where people will direct their attention to once there is nothing left to discover or explore.²⁷³ He asks, “Will it take as long as that before we start the journey inside, down our own time tunnels and deep into the realms of inner space?”²⁷⁴ Although Nicolas’ narrative does not begin until the novel is nearing its end, if *Sexing the Cherry* is not interpreted in a linear fashion, then Nicolas’ comment actually foreshadows the inner journey which he and his inner identity, Jordan, are about to undertake.

²⁷² Ibid, 136.

²⁷³ Bente Gade, “Multiple Selves and Grafted Agents: A Postmodernist Reading of *Sexing the Cherry*,” in *Sponsored by Demons: The Art of Jeanette Winterson*, ed. Marianne Bengston, Marianne Børch, and Cindie Maagaard (Copenhagen: Scholar’s Press, 1999), 33.

²⁷⁴ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989), 136.

As Nicolas prepares to leave for the Navy, he “[puts himself] away in cupboards or out of sight.”²⁷⁵ In taking a final look at himself in the inner mirror of the wardrobe in which he has packed himself away, Winterson emphasizes the inner journey on which Nicolas is about to embark. He validates himself by stating that “[He] looked all right” and leaves to board an admiralty tug, where he is relatively content. However, as Nicolas stands on the deck with a friend one night, he describes how he felt as though he “was falling falling into a black hole with no stars and no life and no helmet.”²⁷⁶ Feeling he has no life in the social domain, wherein he is regularly reprimanded by his parents and Jack, Tradescant suddenly appears beside Nicolas and tells him that the King will be buried at Windsor, and Nicolas, who recognizes him but cannot immediately place where he knows him from, becomes transported and states, “My name is Jordan.”²⁷⁷

Although Nicolas Jordan is not introduced until the end of the novel, which has led many critics to believe that Jordan and Nicolas, although somehow connected, are nevertheless two separate characters that exist in two different times, Winterson provides plenty of evidence in the text to suggest that Nicolas and Jordan are actually the constitutive characters that make up a single, fragmented subject. The aforementioned scene exemplifies one of these moments in which Nicolas and Jordan bleed into one; however, this scene also appears earlier in the text in a section narrated by Jordan that is titled “Time I.” It seems significant that Winterson chooses to use the roman numeral for the number “one” when she provides these lists of observations about objects, time, and paintings, especially since, in the lists that follow, she reverts to using Arabic

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 137.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

numbers. Time I, as narrated by Jordan, tells the same story that Nicolas tells when he becomes transported and identifies himself as Jordan. However, Time I is narrated in the third person, as opposed to the first person narration that Nicolas uses when he describes this experience as it happens to him. Jordan's knowledge of this experience suggests that it is an experience that he and Nicolas share, and, since Nicolas is transformed into Jordan during this scene – an aspect that is highlighted in both renditions – it appears as though Jordan and Nicolas share a body as the inner and social identities of one subject, respectively.

Jordan, perhaps the most dreamy of all the narrators, begins his story, and the novel as a whole, with a scene of the first thing that he saw. He describes a pastoral scene at night, stating that “the sky divided in halves, one cloudy, the other fair.”²⁷⁸ Within the first page of the novel, Winterson puts in place the notions of division, doubling, and multiplicity. Jordan recounts how the fog quickly takes over *as he tries to find the path*, but can only find “hares with staring eyes, poised in the middle of the field and turned to stone.”²⁷⁹ Although the reference to hares may simply be an aesthetic choice, they commonly represent reproduction, and because of this, the allusion to hares appears to suggest the notions of prescribed sex and gender for reproductive purposes, or simply, *heteronormativity*. The fact that they stand in the fog, still as stone, implies that the dumb creatures, devoid of agency, cannot transcend their situation as they are blinded by the fog, or perhaps, the ideological structures that have shaped them. Jordan, unable to find the “right path,” walks with his hands outstretched, “and in this way, for the first time, [he] traced the lineaments of [his] own face opposite [him].”²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ Ibid, I.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 2.

Jordan's quest is a quest to find himself, and in order to find himself, he needs to find his own path. Dissatisfied with the expectations of reality and the ways in which society values facts, maps, and categorization, he states

Every journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle. These are the journeys I want to record. Not the ones I made, but the ones I might have made, or perhaps did make in some other place or time. I could tell you the truth as you will find it in diaries and maps and log-books. I could faithfully describe all that I saw and heard and give you a travel book. You could follow it then, tracing those travels with your finger, putting red flags where I went.²⁸¹

Choosing a journey inwards, Jordan, like Nicolas, still feels the need to escape the ideological powers of society, which shows how Nicolas/Jordan senses that those powers have become formative of his interiority, and the only means of breaking away from them, for Nicolas/Jordan, is through the never-ending search within for an essential self. Jordan states that “[He] discovered that [his] own life was written invisibly, was squashed between the facts,” and that he found that “[He] was giving [himself] the slip and walking through this world like a shadow.”²⁸² Because Jordan, the inner identity of Nicolas, still feels the need to escape the regulatory powers of society that have become reflected and allegorized in his inner world, Winterson suggests that it is only after Nicolas/Jordan has found himself and made sense of the regulatory powers that

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid.

challenge his fragmented identity that he can find “a life” and relate to others in the social domain.

In his following narrative, Jordan states, “To escape from the weight of the world, I leave my body where it is, in conversation or at dinner, and walk through a series of winding streets to a house standing back from the road.”²⁸³ There, in the inner space of Jordan’s world, he finds himself in another world where words continue to exist after they have been uttered by floating in the sky above the citizens who spoke them. In his article, Paul Kintzele observes that “...the words are a permanent inscription of transient emotions and events, more lasting, and perhaps more real, than those who use them.”²⁸⁴ Indeed, Jordan states that “[the] words resist erasure,” and then relays a story about a word “cleaner” who had “been bitten by words still quarrelling.”²⁸⁵ The cleaner sues the original culprits who had spoken the words, and “[the] men responsible made their defence on the grounds that the words no longer belonged to them. Years had passed. Was it their fault if the city had failed to deal with its overheads?”²⁸⁶ Jordan describes how the judge ruled in favor of the defendants and how the plaintiff, who was not satisfied, lined “the chimneys of her accused with vitriol.”²⁸⁷ Winterson’s decision to include this vignette about a language that has been allowed to run wild and is not held accountable for the damage it inflicts metaphorically demonstrates the detrimental effects phallogocentric discourse has on the subjects that try to resist it.

²⁸³ Ibid, 11.

²⁸⁴ Paul Kintzele, “Gender in Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry*,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 12, no. 3 (2010): 5.

²⁸⁵ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989), 11.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

Jordan, in the city where words continue to exist after they are uttered, describes how he once accompanied a cleaner in a balloon, where he was “amazed to hear, as the sights of the city dropped away, a faint murmuring like bees. The murmuring grew louder and louder till it sounded like the clamouring of birds, then like the deafening noise of schoolchildren let out for the holidays.”²⁸⁸ In the deafening roar up above, Jordan describes how “[they] could no longer speak to each other and be heard.”²⁸⁹ In this scene where the words that resist erasure and turn abled ears deaf, Winterson portrays the materiality of language as Nicolas/Jordan experiences it, that is, as clichéd structures that no longer bear any similarity to their original meaning, which has resulted in a breach between the representation offered by language and reality. This rendition of a hegemonic language that has become hackneyed – or the Other – portrays how language limits the possibilities in which representation or reality can play out, as the language Winterson depicts resists erasure and prevents the materialization of new modes of expression.

After a hard day’s work, Jordan states that “[as they] descended through the clean air [they] saw, passing [them] by from time to time, new flocks of words coming from the people in the streets who, not content with the weight of their lives, continually turned the heaviest of things into the lightest of properties.”²⁹⁰ In depicting a quite literal materialization of language, even if it takes place in an imaginary space, Winterson shows how the clichéd sedimentation of strict social norms has restricted the possibilities for individualized identities to materialize, as words and concepts continue to linger after they have been uttered. Gade supports this interpretation in her article when she states that “discourse does not merely make our bodies

²⁸⁸ Ibid, 12.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, 13.

accessible but determines what we know of our inner selves,”²⁹¹ implying that it is only through established modes of discourse that the inner self can be known, and hence, materialize.

Although Winterson provides substantial evidence throughout her work regarding her distaste for hackneyed and clichéd expression, this image simultaneously conveys other possible interpretations that contradict the notion that language constrains identity and new modes of expression from materializing. While Winterson’s literal depiction of the materialization of language illustrates the powerlessness subjects face when antagonized with language – as having completed their task for the day, new words take the place of the old ones – it also points to the idea that new concepts and modes of expression are constantly taking place and becoming sedimented. However, rather than portraying the words as *sedimenting on the ground*, Winterson portrays the materialization of language as rising above and floating in the sky.

In choosing to depict the materialization of language as rising above as opposed to sedimenting on the ground, Winterson expresses a desire to set language free. Yet in setting language free, she also highlights how certain concepts continue to linger longer than others, which is portrayed by the story about the men’s words who went wild and bit the cleaner. In this sense, Winterson depicts how the materiality of the signifier via the dialectic of naturalization is simultaneously detrimental to subjects for the coercion it places on their individualized identities (heteronormativity) and emancipatory for the freedom in which it offers subjects to displace anachronistic concepts with new interpretations. In portraying the materiality of the signifier in quite literal terms, Gade argues that Winterson shows how “Power is implicated in every

²⁹¹ Bente Gade, “Multiple Selves and Grafted Agents: A Postmodernist Reading of *Sexing the Cherry*,” in *Sponsored by Demons: The Art of Jeanette Winterson*, ed. Marianne Bengtson, Marianne Børch, and Cindie Maagaard (Copenhagen: Scholar’s Press, 1999), 28.

representation” and how “Power is also intimately involved in the process of becoming a subject, as the subject is discursively constituted.”²⁹² However, Winterson – in depicting the language that truly resists erasure as phallogocentric, which is allegorized through the story of the *men’s words* that lingered for many years – demonstrates that the subject’s differentiated perception and its interpretative abilities are socially- and linguistically-constructed, and thereby limited by the cruel and rabid concepts that have been allowed to run wild within the social psyche.

Gade’s interpretation that the power associated with phallogocentric discourse plays a part in every representation, and hence, in the becoming of a subject, suggests that the becoming of subjects via language allows for the power associated with language to be transversed in the process. In other words, the scene in which Jordan imagines the power of language in quite material terms indicates that the powers of language are simultaneously resistant and malleable. Hence, Winterson shows how the power of language transforms into the subject’s own discursive power because it is a *signifying subject*. In this sense, the scene in which words materialize and become an entity in and of themselves demonstrates how phallogocentric discourse creates the subject, and in turn, how the subject then becomes the creator of discourse. However, Winterson does not portray Jordan as one of the creators of discourse in this scene, as the words he utters do not materialize. Because Jordan has not yet mastered the art of re-signification, Jordan’s ability to re-signify the world is directly dependent on his ability to cite other genders in order to transcend the masculine identity he has been coerced to assume.

²⁹² Ibid.

As Jordan's narrative continues, he returns to the house he mentions at the beginning of the scene in which he describes the city of words. He describes the strange custom in the house, wherein the family who lives there would not "allow their feet to touch the floor."²⁹³ Winterson's portrayal of characters who deny floors and celebrate ceilings evokes the idea of transcendence and the subject's becoming, as, similar to the way in which she depicts a wish to set language free, she likewise expresses a desire to free her characters from becoming grounded by the sedimentation of ideological concepts. Nevertheless, it is in this house – with furniture suspended from the ceiling – that Jordan "noticed a woman whose face was a sea voyage [he] had not the courage to attempt."²⁹⁴ Although not yet named, Fortunata's appearance here incites Jordan to continue his inner voyage in order to find her, as she climbs "down from her window on a thin rope which she cut and re-knotted a number of times" before Jordan has a chance to meet her.²⁹⁵ In leaving the house that denied floors and celebrated ceilings, Jordan sets off in search for Fortunata, looking in theatres, operas, cafes, casinos, bawdy-houses and finally ending in "a pen of prostitutes kept by a rich man for his friends."²⁹⁶

Although Jordan's quest to find himself has already been established in the text, it is not until Fortunata's appearance that Jordan's journey gains meaning, as, before he sees her, his search for an essential self is relatively aimless. In this sense, Fortunata, like the fortune that her name suggests, becomes Jordan's emblem for self-discovery, self-knowledge, and self-definition. Even though Jordan does not find Fortunata until the near novel's end, Winterson provides a

²⁹³ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989), 14.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 15.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 16.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 26-7.

glimpse of her after one of the Dog-Woman's narratives. While Winterson typically uses symbols to signify whose narrative is about to begin, this particular glimpse of Fortunata is not marked by an image, and in this sense, appears to be part of the Dog-Woman's narrative. In having Fortunata, who is a manifestation of Jordan, appear at the end of one of the Dog-Woman's narratives, Fortunata's appearance foreshadows Nicolas' and the chemist's meeting at the end of the novel; in this sense, Winterson hints that it is only after Jordan has grafted a part of Fortunata onto himself will he, as Nicolas/Jordan, join the chemist in order to stand against the phallogocentric powers that regulate the modern world. Although Jordan seeks his essential self, he also seeks a community in the social domain.

Fortunata's appearance at the end of the Dog-Woman's narrative suggests that it is only when Nicolas/Jordan has grafted a part of Fortunata onto himself that he can begin to form relations with others not dictated by the laws of heteronormativity or phallogocentrism. Fortunata's symbolization of the self-sufficiency and freedom sought by Jordan is further emphasized in the scene after the Dog-Woman's narrative. In this scene, Fortunata is shown teaching "her pupils to become points of light."²⁹⁷ Although Fortunata stands for the freedom, self-sufficiency, and self-knowledge that Jordan longs to have, the scene in which she teaches her pupils how to become points of light also depicts her as possessing the catalytic power of re-signification. Indeed, she tells her pupils, "[through] the body, the body is conquered," and "she maintains [her pupils] as metal in a fiery furnace, tempering, stretching, forcing sinews into impossible shapes and calling her art nature."²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 76.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

Hence, Fortunata, who abdicates her marriage to a prince and the social regulations of society in general, has established a counter existence outside of the phallogocentric law. In calling her art nature, Winterson implies that Fortunata has mastered the art of displacement, re-signification, and re-naturalization. Fortunata's ability to re-naturalize the bodies of her pupils in the same fashion as a blacksmith tempers metal depicts the body as a site of malleability, and because Fortunata states that it is *through the body that the body is conquered*, Winterson implies that the re-naturalization of phallogocentric notions takes place through the materiality of the malleable body. Because Fortunata tells her pupils "that light burns in [their] bodies and threatens to dissolve [them] at any moment," it appears as though the malleability of the material body manifests from the physical embodiment of characters' inner identities in the social domain.²⁹⁹

Jordan's search for Fortunata continuously places him in primarily feminine circles, and in this sense, Fortunata's first appearance in *Sexing the Cherry* is the precipitous moment that initiates Jordan's transformation into a transgendered subject. When Jordan arrives at the brothel in search of Fortunata, he states that the women in the brothel were "gracious," but advised him to return dressed as a woman. Jordan accepts their counsel and returns to the prostitutes dressed as a woman, and the act of dressing as a woman forces Jordan to cite femininity for the first time. After inquiring about Fortunata and learning that the prostitutes know nothing about her, Jordan begins to wonder how they can live in such "privation" and "without any space."³⁰⁰ He observes that "There was silence, and it seemed as though they were communicating without words."³⁰¹ In

²⁹⁹

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 27.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

learning more about the women who lived there, he soon discovered that all was not as it appeared: the prostitutes had an agreement with the Nuns who lived in the Convent of the Holy Mother down the river, and whenever one of the women wanted to “amuse herself in the city, visit friends, eat dinner with her beloved, [she] dropped herself into the fast-flowing water and was carried downstream towards the convent.”³⁰² Jordan discovers that, in this way, the women locked in the brothel actually came and went as they pleased. He states that the owner of the brothel, “being a short-sighted man of scant intelligence,” had unknowingly “financed the futures of thousands of women,” and “never noticed that the women under his care were always different.”³⁰³

In imagining a brothel in which the prostitutes kept captive by a “short-sighted man of scant intelligence” are actually completely free to come and go, Jordan appears to associate the imprisoning aspects of heteronormativity with masculinity and phallogocentrism. Having already expressed his desire to find his inner self that is free from the coercions of society that his social identity, Nicolas, senses in the social domain, Jordan’s depiction of the prostitutes that take advantage of a man who cares nothing for others but only for “things,” and for that matter, things that can be measured and valued, highlights Jordan’s desire to find a counter existence. In this scene in particular, Winterson shows how Jordan is beginning to consider femininity as an alternative to his masculinity. Although the prostitutes are duplicitous, Jordan portrays them in a much more positive light than he does the man that owns them, and Jordan observes how the only means of their survival is through their duplicity. Hence, in trying to find a counter

³⁰² Ibid, 28.

³⁰³ Ibid.

existence to heteronormativity and the masculine identity he is supposed to assume, Jordan finds femininity an ironically freeing option to choose as a counter existence.

Jordan leaves the brothel to continue his search for Fortunata, but decides to “continue as a woman for a time and [takes] a job on a fish stall.”³⁰⁴ Jordan’s decision to carry on with his disguise as a woman further substantiates the idea that he wishes to distance himself from masculinity, heteronormativity, and phallogocentrism for the ideals that they impose on him. Indeed, he states: “I have met a number of people who, anxious to be free of the burdens of their gender, have dressed themselves men as women and women as men.”³⁰⁵ Jordan, wishing to be free from the burden of his gender as he struggles to make his own identity align with its ideals, relieves himself by dressing as a woman. Kintzele notes that “Jordan’s desire is for disembodiment and escape. The surname of Jordan’s mentor and father figure, John Tradescant, is a near-miss for the transcendence for which Jordan yearns.”³⁰⁶ Because Jordan desires to transcend the regulatory ideals of sex and gender that are forced on him, and having a limited number of known genders to cite, Jordan’s decision to dress as a woman is his duplicitous act of defiance against the phallogocentrism that attempts to signify him as masculine.

It is at this point when Jordan, disguised as a woman and working at the fish stall, “[notices] that women have a private language. A language not dependent on the constructions of men but structured by signs and expressions, and that uses ordinary words as code-words

³⁰⁴ Ibid, 29.

³⁰⁵ Ibid, 28.

³⁰⁶ Paul Kintzele, “Gender in Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry*,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 12, no. 3 (2010): 5.

meaning something other.”³⁰⁷ Although Jordan states that he was regarded with suspicion because “[he] did not speak the language,” this third encounter with language that Nicolas/Jordan experiences reiterates his desire to find a new mode of representation.³⁰⁸ However, rather than fulfilling this desire, Jordan soon discovers that the secret language of women is used at the expense of men. He notes that he

watched women flirting with men, pleasing men, doing business with men, and then [he] watched them collapsing into laughter, sharing the joke, while the men, all unknowing, felt themselves master of the situation and went off to brag in barrooms and to preach from pulpits the folly of the weaker sex.³⁰⁹

Jordan reveals that “This conspiracy of women shocked [him],” as he had no idea how little women thought of men.³¹⁰ Yet, when the woman who owns the fish stall gives Jordan a ‘rule book’ about how to deal with men, Jordan, “observing [his] own heart and the behaviour of those around [him he] conceded it to be true.”³¹¹

Although Jordan senses a schism between the phallogocentric representations of language and his experience of reality, the rule book does not mention language at all, but states very specific ways in which women should interact with men. Because the owner of the fish stall gives Jordan the rule book after he has lived as a woman for a while and discovered that women have a secret language, it is in this scene that Jordan first understands the secret language of

³⁰⁷ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989), 29.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

women. Jordan only concludes that the statements in the rule book are true after self-examining himself, and his ability to make sense of the rule book and to recognize its truth indicates that he can identify and communicate with women. Because Nicolas/Jordan is anxious about his inability to assume a masculine existence and penetrate a male society, his developing skills in the secret language of women demonstrates his desire to replace phallogocentric discourse with a discourse that will offer its subjects more freedom in how they experience and interpret the world. However, in self-examining himself and finding the rule book to be true, Jordan realizes that the construction of phallogocentrism, having been created by men, implicates all men, even himself, in spite of the efforts he makes to distance himself from it.

Hence, Jordan realizes that he is already a sexed subject. Kintzele states that although “Winterson describes a flexible identity, one that oscillates between the single and the multiple... she also draws the reader’s attention to the structure that gives rise to that identity in the first place.”³¹² Although Jordan realizes that he is already a sexed subject based on his social identity, the structure that has given rise to the multiplicity of his inner identity is related to his perpetual failure of signification: first, as his failure to assume the construction of his gender-as-sex, and, second, as his failure to execute an accurate representation of his gender-as-performativity. Upset by the realization that, as a man, he is implicated in the structure of phallogocentrism because he has already been *sexed* and is thereby not able to transcend the assignments that the regulatory ideal has inscribed onto him, Jordan states that his “heaviness was at its limit and [he] could not raise [himself] up from where [he] was sitting.”³¹³ However, Jordan notes that he “was one in a

³¹² Paul Kintzele, “Gender in Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry*,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 12, no. 3 (2010): 8.

³¹³ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989), 30.

long line of unfortunates sitting like crows on a fallen tree,” and deciding to nevertheless carry on with his journey to find Fortunata, he waves a red mullet above his head and is carried off by a flock of sea birds.³¹⁴

The moment that Jordan realizes his status as already having been sexed, and to some extent gendered, Jordan nevertheless chooses to continue on with his journey for his inner transcendence. In depicting Jordan as being carried off by a flock of sea birds, Winterson, rather than depicting Jordan as succumbing to that weight and subscribing to a masculine existence in the social domain, portrays Jordan’s liberation. Jordan realizes that while femininity may represent an ironically freeing counter existence, the cultural and corporeal limits of his sexed body nevertheless bars him from assuming a feminine position. The rule book, then, highlights that femininity, sitting on the other end of the gender continuum, is also implicated in the structure of phallogocentrism, as, in dictating mandates on how women should interact with men, it further substantiates the dichotomous and reductive notions of phallogocentrism. Wanting to discover his essential self free from the phallogocentric representations of the world, Jordan’s strange means of departure depicts his symbolic release from those gendered categories that weigh subjects down.

After Jordan is carried off by the flock of sea birds, he finds himself in a town in which he discusses the nature of love with the marketplace people. Love – a common theme in Winterson’s work – is debated from two standpoints: “the school of heaviness” and the side “who believed that only passion freed the soul from its mud-hut.”³¹⁵ During the debate about

³¹⁴ Ibid, 31.

³¹⁵ Ibid, 38.

love, the themes on light versus weight, freedom versus imprisonment, inner space versus outer space, and choice versus acculturation are raised, and Jordan asks himself, “Was I searching for a dancer whose name I did not know or was I searching for the dancing part of myself?”³¹⁶

Although Jordan’s inner journey has already been clearly established, in this self-reflexive moment, Jordan realizes that Fortunata is the symbol for his essential self. Jordan, who has already noticed that “[he] was giving [himself] the slip,” becomes aware that he is searching for the dancing part of himself that constantly eludes him.³¹⁷

In the following section, the idea of elusion is further elaborated when Jordan states that “there is a town [he] sometimes dream[s] about, whose inhabitants are so cunning that to escape the insistence of creditors they knock down their houses in a single night and rebuild them elsewhere.”³¹⁸ Jordan notes that the inhabitants are not always successful in their elusive endeavors, as the the pursuers are sometimes waiting for the escapees at their “new site of choice;” nevertheless, Jordan observes that “as a game it is a most fulfilling pastime and accounts for the extraordinary longevity of the men and women who live there.”³¹⁹ In this scene, Winterson depicts the notion of displacement through her portrayal of these nomadic inhabitants and she juxtaposes displacement with the notion of “settling down and rooting like trees... [that has] found only infection and discontent.”³²⁰ By depicting the displacement of the self as resulting in longevity, Winterson reimagines that the concept of longevity is an effect of the self-preservation of the subject’s inner identity. In this sense, Winterson’s interpretation of longevity

³¹⁶ Ibid, 39.

³¹⁷ Ibid, 2.

³¹⁸ Ibid, 43.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

differs from the common understanding of longevity wherein heteronormative ideals are typically connoted.

Winterson's literal depiction of displacement brings to mind Judith Butler's theory about the materiality of the signifier, and in particular, it resonates with Butler's supposition that the discursive effect cannot materialize based on a single utterance. Indeed, Winterson dramatically illustrates how the notion of displacement nevertheless depends on recognizable structures to remain intact, as her portrayal of displacement suggests that the lack of structural associations will result in abjection. Winterson highlights the importance association plays in the act of displacement by depicting inhabitants who never leave the city, but move from place to place *within the city*. Indeed, when Jordan states that "[in] the city the inhabitants have reconciled two discordant desires: to remain in one place and to leave it behind for ever," it becomes apparent that the inhabitants do not embrace complete abjection by remaining in the city, as they choose to remain somewhere that is recognizable.³²¹ While Winterson expresses a desire to set language and her characters free by displacing phallogocentrism and socially-constructed sedimentations, she also reveals that the relation between language and reality must nevertheless continue to rely on the structures that give rise to intelligibility.

It is at the end of this scene, where Jordan, who is looking for the Museum of Antiquities he happened upon when looking for a family he had dined with the night before, meets a miller who has erected a windmill on the site where the museum was and who directs him to the house of the Twelve Dancing Princesses. Hence, Winterson's depiction of displacement humorously

³²¹ Ibid.

places Jordan on *his right path*, as it leads him to the house in which Fortunata's eleven sisters live. When Jordan finds the house, the eleven princesses tell him stories about how they all came to live together, and in this sense, the princesses tell stories about their lives *after marriage*. Because "one of the standard conclusions to a fairy tale is marriage," Winterson uses this section to rewrite fairy tales, poetry, and the genre of the fairy tale in order to demonstrate how the displacement and re-signification of socially-constructed concepts can open up "space" in which new concepts can materialize.³²²

Kintzele makes a similar claim when he notes that "[even] if the audience is adult, to rewrite a fairy tale is to rewrite childhood; it is to evacuate a deep layer of cultural sediment and refashion it."³²³ In comparing and contrasting Winterson's story about "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" to the Brothers Grimms' story about "The Dancing Shoes," Kintzele argues that

... Winterson, in twelve vignettes, shows that the story does not (and should not) end [with marriage]. By complicating the closure of the standard fairy tale, Winterson disrupts the complacent manner in which the fairy tale underwrites social roles. But if she adds an element of realism to the fairy tale, she also reveals the fairy tale – that is, the ideological image – that structures reality; by substituting her own tale for it, she proposes a refashioning of gender categories.³²⁴

³²² Paul Kintzele, "Gender in Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 12, no. 3 (2010): 9.

³²³ *Ibid*, 8.

³²⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

Jordan, in wishing to free himself of the gender categories imposed upon him, imagines meeting eleven princesses who were able to do just that, in spite of the marital commitments that were forced on them by their father. In this sense, Winterson not only reveals how the ideological images in fairy tales structure reality, but she also shows how the ideological images of normative gender theories structure reality. In other words, the significance with which the princesses break free from the marriages that are imposed on them by their father, the King – and, thereby, the law and the *Law of the Father* – depicts the displacement of the sedimentation of phallogocentrism, at the same time as it opens up a space in which new stories, concepts, and gender categories can emerge.

Although none of the princesses has a happy marriage, as Jeffrey Roessner and others have pointed out that they either kill or abandon their husbands – with the exception of the fifth princess who turns her husband into a frog the first time they kiss – Winterson challenges her audience to consider how other renditions of fairy tales, genres, genders, and existences are possible. In her article, “Fiery Constellations: Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry* and Benjamin’s Materialist Historiography,” Angela Smith states:

These tales’ strategies of reversal and humor reconfigure power structures: the women violently reclaim their right to freedom and to self-narrative, and their narratives question mythical norms. The violence of these stories demands acknowledgement of what is at stake in narrative and historiography.³²⁵

³²⁵ Angela Marie Smith, “Fiery Constellations: Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry* and Benjamin’s Materialist Historiography,” *College Literature* 32, no. 3 (2005): 28.

Indeed, Winterson's decision to have her princesses use violence in order to displace phallogocentrism does not convey that the princesses can only be free from the Law of the Father and the shackles of heteronormativity after they have murdered or abandoned or re-signified (as a frog) their husbands. Rather, as Smith suggests, the princesses' violence against their husbands indicates the exigency with which they needed to remove themselves from their specific situations and from their social roles more generally.

Moreover, not all of Winterson's depictions of violence against men are wholly unfounded, as, in choosing to rewrite the genre of the fairy tale, Winterson also rewrites the literature that is cruel to women and that depicts cruelty to women. This becomes apparent through Winterson's revision of Robert Browning's poem, "My Last Duchess." In Browning's poem, the Duke brags about murdering his last child-bride to the emissary who has come to negotiate the terms for the Duke's new marriage. In Winterson's adaptation of Browning's poem, she re-imagines that the princess kills her controlling husband by suffocating him for burning the body of a saint that she liked to keep around the house. By depicting a princess who values her collectibles more than the life of her own husband, Winterson preserves the mentality of Browning's Duke, but refashions it so that the princess is also avenging the abominable murder of her token saint.

In the third princess's story, Winterson rewrites Lord Byron's poem, "She Walks in Beauty." The third princess describes how she murdered her husband with a bow and arrow after she caught him having a love affair with a boy. Admittedly, Winterson's decision to revise Byron's poem in this way is less clear than her decision to reclaim women from the cruelty of

Browning's Duke. However, in setting out to displace phallogocentrism, Winterson reverses Byron's overt objectification of women to the objectification of men. In reversing the objectification of women to the objectification of men and in depicting the man objectified as homosexual, Winterson attempts to save women from their exclusion and objectification in society, as she appears to suggest that the second-class status of women has been created by the phallogocentrism that celebrates male homosociality and strips femininity of its humanity. Hence, Winterson necessarily displaces (or, disposes of) the masculine (or, the male characters) with brute force in order to allow the princesses to obtain their freedom from phallogocentrism and to restore their humanity.

Yet, Winterson also rewrites the story of Rapunzel. In her version of the classic fairy tale, the fifth princess, who accidentally turned her husband into a frog when they first kissed, is the witch. The prince, who "rescues" Rapunzel, cruelly blinds the fifth princess in a field of thorns and then takes Rapunzel away. After the fifth princess is finished telling her tale, she sarcastically states that "they lived happily ever after, of course," giving a new and ominous twist to the clichéd ending of fairy tales.³²⁶ By freeing the princesses from the Law of the Father, Winterson depicts the hardships the women have had to endure existing in a phallogocentric society. However, Rapunzel's story also draws attention to the ways in which the genre of the fairy tale itself inflicts violence onto the audience for idealizing and romanticizing a false conclusion, and for that matter, a false reality.

³²⁶ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989), 52.

The ninth princess states that she was given the name “Jess” by her husband, and she then tells Jordan the story of her abusive marriage in which her husband kept her incarcerated through various means because “[he] said [Jess] would tear him to pieces if he dealt softly with [her].”³²⁷ In this vignette, Winterson brings to light the imprisoning aspects of gender and the cruel reiteration of gender as a means of naturalizing it. Jess states that “[she] was none of these things, but [she] became them.”³²⁸ In describing her gruesome murder of her husband, in which she “tore his liver from his body,” Jess states that she didn’t understand why he looked surprised, because “[as] your lover describes you, so you are.”³²⁹ Hence, by using male characters to stand for the phallogocentrism that she attempts to displace, Winterson depicts the dialectic of naturalization play out, as she demonstrates how the reiteration of phallogocentric ideals is detrimental to subjects as it becomes formative of their identities.

Jordan, having heard their stories, asks where the twelfth princess is and discovers that the dancer he is looking for, Fortunata, is the twelfth princess. The eleven sisters tell Jordan that she never came to live with them, and that she never married the prince that had discovered their secret, but “flew from the altar like a bird from a snare and walked a tightrope between the steeple of the church and the mast of a ship weighing anchor in the bay.”³³⁰ Still determined to find Fortunata, Jordan leaves the house in which the eleven princesses live, but the structure of his narrative changes dramatically. Before Jordan meets the princesses, his narrative is consistently imaginative, but afterwards his narratives vacillate between a critical self-reflexivity,

³²⁷ Ibid, 57.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid, 61.

his usual fantasies, musings about abstract notions and theories, and *his relationships with others*. In this sense, the sudden change in Jordan's narrative structure signifies that his encounter with the eleven princesses has precipitated the onset of his metamorphosis into a transgendered subject.

Indeed, for the first time in *Jordan's* narrative, we see Jordan interacting with the Dog-Woman and Tradescant, wherein he contemplates himself and his relationships with them. Jordan, who has cited femininity, considered the coercion of regulatory powers, and contemplated the malleability of phallogocentric discourse, comes to a self-realization:

Only in the course of [my journey] have I realized its true aim. When I left England I thought I was running away. Running away from uncertainty and confusion but most of all running away from myself. I thought I might become someone else in time, grafted on to something better and stronger. And then I saw that the running away was a running towards. An effort to catch up with my fleet-footed self, living another life in a different way.³³¹

Although Jordan's journey for self-discovery has already been mentioned in the text several times, it is not until this moment that Jordan realizes that what he seeks is to reimagine himself in relation to others by describing his lived experience to another. Rather than running away from the uncertainty and confusion of strict social regulations and running away from his social identity as Nicolas, Jordan discovers that he is actually running *towards* his "fleet-footed self,"

³³¹ Ibid, 86-7.

Fortunata, who he senses is “living another life in a different way.”³³² It seems as though Jordan, in searching for his fleet-footed self, is trying to learn how to live life in a way that frees him from the weights of heteronormativity and phallogocentrism, but which will nevertheless allow him to relate to others. Indeed, as Winterson shows through Nicolas’ narratives, relating to others appears to be something that Nicolas/Jordan struggles to do.

In one of Jordan’s more “realistic” narratives, he states that “[it] was Tradescant’s plan to stock up with seeds and pods and any exotic thing that might take the fancy of the English and so be made natural in our gardens.”³³³ In this scene, Jordan *naturalizes* exotic plants that have been displaced from their natural habitat and original form through the art of grafting. The theme of grafting in *Sexing the Cherry* appears to serve two purposes: it instates an idea of abjection because it brings to mind the notion of monstrosity, and it suggests that nature is constructed as the plants that have been grafted are made natural in another environment. Indeed, Jordan appears to believe that nature is a construct as it is he who suggests that grafting is a way in which plants can become natural in an alien habitat. In offering a more detailed description about the art of grafting, Jordan explains that

Grafting is the means whereby a plant, perhaps tender or uncertain, is fused into a hardier member of its strain, and so the two take advantage of each other and produce a third kind, without seed or parent. In this way fruits have been made

³³² Ibid, 87.

³³³ Ibid, 84.

resistant to disease and certain plants have learned to grow where previously they could not.³³⁴

Because Nicolas/Jordan is tender and uncertain, and because he is trying to learn how to live in an alienating world that has been constructed by heteronormativity and phallogocentrism, Winterson suggests that Nicolas/Jordan will only become resistant to the diseases of those ideologies after he has been grafted onto something “hardier” and transformed into a “third kind.”³³⁵ In this sense, Nicolas/Jordan’s desire to be free from the coercive and regulatory powers of the social domain is contingent on Jordan’s ability to graft femininity onto himself and to naturalize his transgendered identity.

However, Jordan mentions how “many in the Church...condemn this practice as unnatural,” and as Jordan tries to graft together two different species of cherries, the Dog-Woman expresses this sentiment when she asks, ““Of what sex is that monster you are making?””³³⁶ When Jordan tries to explain to her that the tree will retain its sex even though it was not born from seed, the Dog-Woman tells Jordan that “such things had no gender and were a confusion to themselves.”³³⁷ Because Winterson notes how the tree retains its sex after it has been grafted, she implies that while the materiality of sex is static, the materiality of gender is nevertheless a confusion, and for that matter, a conglomeration of unlike and changeable things. In disregarding the Dog-Woman’s comments, Jordan mentions how he “wondered whether [grafting] was an art

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid, 85.

³³⁷ Ibid.

[he] might apply to [him]self,” and states how he would like “to have some of Tradescant grafted on to [him] so that [he] could be a hero like [Tradescant].”³³⁸

Although Jordan expresses a desire to have a part of Tradescant grafted onto him, it is a part of Fortunata who eventually becomes grafted onto Jordan, as it is the power that Fortunata possesses that Jordan needs in order to be “brought home” to Nicolas in the social domain. Indeed, when Jordan finally finds Fortunata, she is “turning her hands through [a figure of eight] as a potter turns clay on the wheel,” reshaping her pupils and embodying the potter that Jordan wishes to become.³³⁹ Jordan listens to her story about dancing with her sisters in the silver city in the sky and about their eventual capture. Although Fortunata describes fantastic concepts about “people who had abandoned gravity, [and how] gravity had abandoned them,” she claims validity to her story by stating that “the history of the city... is a logical one, [as] each piece fit[s] into the other without strain.”³⁴⁰ Although Jordan is reluctant to accept any truth to Fortunata’s stories, her appeal to logic when describing a fantastic chain of events nevertheless speaks to Jordan’s desires: her stories demonstrate how reality is relative to the individual experiences and differentiated perceptions of subjects, and that the truths of reality and social intelligibility are contingent on the structures of logic.

While Jordan stays with Fortunata, he gives her his medallion that bears the inscription, “Remember the rock from whence ye are hewn and the pit from whence ye are digged,” and in this way, Jordan symbolically unburdens himself of his gender.³⁴¹ However, in reading the

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid, 103.

³⁴⁰ Ibid, 108.

³⁴¹ Ibid, 112.

inscription, Fortunata laughs and asks Jordan ““What about your wings? ...How can you forget those when the stumps are still deep in your shoulder-blades?””³⁴² Jordan does not respond to Fortunata, but thinks to himself that “[in] the Bible only the angels have wings; the rest of us have to wait to be rescued.”³⁴³ While Jordan believes that his salvation is dependent on another, Fortunata embodies self-sufficiency as she has learned “to dance alone, for its own sake and for hers,” which is further emphasized by her decision to not accompany Jordan when he leaves.³⁴⁴ Although Jordan desires the self-sufficiency that Fortunata possesses, as he prepares to leave her, he realizes that “[He] had [him]self to begin with, and that is what [he] lost...lost it...in the gap between [his] ideal of [him]self and [his] pounding heart.”³⁴⁵ Because Jordan still believes that he has lost his inner self, it appears as though the regulatory powers that have coerced him into assuming a masculine position continue to hold power over him, and by believing that he needs to be rescued by another, his feeling of powerlessness becomes twofold.

However, in the following scene, the Dog-Woman notices that Jordan is not wearing the medallion that she had given him, but is instead wearing a pendant of “a tiny pair of shoes, dancing shoes, their feet curved inwards as though standing on tip-toe.”³⁴⁶ Although Winterson does not show Fortunata give Jordan the pendant, in an earlier scene, the necklace belongs to Fortunata. Because Jordan wears a necklace given to him by an imaginary woman, Jordan’s possession of the necklace indicates that his inner identity has become transgendered and has become materialized – as it has taken on a physical presence as the pendant – in the realm of the

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴

³⁴⁵ Ibid, 113.

³⁴⁶ Ibid, 123-4.

seventeenth century. Hence, by giving him her pendant and by unburdening him of his medallion, Fortunata both relieves Jordan of his masculinity and also allows a part of herself to be grafted onto Jordan. However, after Fortunata refuses to leave with Jordan, he states that “[we] are alone in this quest, and Fortunata is right not to disguise it, though she may be wrong about love.”³⁴⁷

Jordan, thinking about the isolation that his own quest has resulted in, contemplates the pilgrims who search for God in an attempt to lose themselves. Jordan expresses that he has never understood the desire to lose oneself as he believes that it is easy to lose oneself, but then states that it must be “the ego they are talking about, the hollow, screaming cadaver that has no spirit within it.”³⁴⁸ Upon mentioning the ego, Jordan states: “I think that cadaver is only the ideal self run mad, and if the other life, the secret life, could be found and brought home, then a person might live in peace and have no need for God. After all, He has no need for us, being complete.”³⁴⁹ In believing that his salvation is contingent on his rescue from another, Jordan falls ill shortly after returning to England with the pineapple. The portrayal of Jordan’s illness through the Dog-Woman’s narratives illustrates that his “ideal self [has] run mad,” in spite of his newfound status as transgendered.³⁵⁰ Jordan’s narratives stop during this time in which he is ill, and he is shown raving in the Dog-Woman’s narratives for Fortunata. It is at this point, when Jordan, having allowed his ideal self to run mad, is rescued by the Dog-Woman who demands

³⁴⁷ Ibid, 116.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

that her witch of a neighbor “[make] him well... otherwise [she] may not say what maternal rage might do.”³⁵¹

Jordan recovers after he has been nursed back to health by the Dog-Woman and the witch, and in the following narrative, Nicolas/Jordan seeks out the chemist who is camping by the mercury-polluted river. Although their conversation is kept to a minimum, Nicolas thinks to himself that “[he] wanted to thank her for trying to save us, for trying to save [him], because it felt that personal, though [he didn’t] know why. But when [he] tried to speak [his] throat was clogged with feelings that resist words.”³⁵² As Nicolas and the chemist sit back-to-back beside the river in silence, they seem to understand one another despite their lack of verbal communication. In this sense, their silent meeting signifies that their union has established a counter existence to the phallogocentrism that they have both eschewed, as their mutual refusal to conform to the phallogocentric society in which they live is marked by their decision to camp beside the rotting river in order to resist the regulatory powers that shape social intelligibility.

Nicolas/Jordan’s quest to find an alternative existence to the coercive and normalizing forces of phallogocentrism through his inner self leads him to the chemist, who embodies the heroism that Nicolas/Jordan idolizes for her ability to act outside of the heteronormative prescriptions of society. Because the chemist lives her life according to her beliefs and does not subscribe to a programmed existence, she saves Nicolas by offering him a platform on which he can resist the regulatory powers of phallogocentrism, heteronormativity, masculinity, and modernity. Yet, their meeting only occurs after Nicolas/Jordan has embarked on his inner journey

³⁵¹ Ibid, 162.

³⁵² Ibid, 164-5.

– wherein Jordan has cited femininity and grafted a part of Fortunata onto himself – revealing that Nicolas/Jordan is only able to resist the regulatory powers of society and join the chemist’s campaign because he has become a transgendered subject. However, Jordan’s temporary insanity after grafting a portion of Fortunata onto himself also shows that transgendered subjects can only displace the sedimentation of phallogocentrism through a collective effort, and this interpretation is supported by the Dog-Woman’s decision to rescue Jordan from the alienation that phallogocentrism inflicts on the subjects who do not conform to its ideologies.

After Nicolas has met the chemist, the text jumps back to the Dog-Woman’s narrative. In her narrative, Jordan describes how he became lost in the fog and then fell and hit his head. After being knocked unconscious for a moment, he walked with his hands outstretched in front of him until he “suddenly touched another face and screamed out.”³⁵³ The fog cleared for a moment, and Jordan “saw that the stranger was himself.”³⁵⁴ This scene, which reiterates the scene described by Jordan in his first narrative when he “trace[d] the lineaments of his own face opposite of him,” indicates that Nicolas/Jordan’s journeys have finally led him to the self-knowledge he has sought and that that self-knowledge will allow him to re-signify “the future.”³⁵⁵ Because Jordan states that “even the most solid of things and the most real, the best-loved and the well-known, are only hand-shadows on the wall. Empty space and points of light,” Winterson highlights how the phallogocentric signifieds that have attributed a materiality onto their respective signifiers are simply “empty space.”³⁵⁶ In this sense, Winterson shows how socially-constructed concepts are

³⁵³ Ibid, 166.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid, 2.

³⁵⁶ Ibid, 167.

nevertheless arbitrary and malleable. In closing her novel with the impending destruction that the Great Fire of London brought about – and for that matter, on a note of abjection – Winterson suggests that Nicolas/Jordan’s newfound status as a constituted and transgendered subject will allow him and the chemist/Dog-Woman to displace the sedimentation of phallogocentrism, as the materiality of phallogocentrism is nothing more than “a fake.”³⁵⁷

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

In Coda, or, This World Which is Not Fixed

Throughout this text, I have tried to demonstrate how language shapes an understanding of the world and how certain discourses – whether they manifest through the medium of theory, history, law, literature, or human subjects – become formative of identity, conceptualization, and the social fabric of the world. Although I have challenged Michel Foucault’s notion about the “prison of the body” and Jacques Lacan’s theory about how the social *I* replaces the specular *I* after the subject adopts language, the ideas presented in their texts speak truth, if, in fact, some meaning to the term “truth” can be ascribed here. Nevertheless, their ideas about the construction of subjects must be acknowledged as social intelligibility is always linguistically, historically, and culturally derived.

However, Foucault’s and Lacan’s ideas promote the notion of deterministic constructivism, as they do, in varying degrees, deny the subject’s agency. Although Lacan seemingly flirts with the idea of the specular *I*’s mental permanence, his belief that subjects nevertheless succumb to their social *I* after they have adopted language because human knowledge is structured as paranoid equivocates the substantial evidence he provides in his text for the mental permanence and perseverance of the subject’s specular *I*. It is for this reason that Simone de Beauvoir’s theory about the subject’s becoming and its desire for transcendence proposes a more realistic description of how the subject comes into being and how the subject is always in the process of coming into its being. Furthermore, Julia Kristeva’s theory about the abject, which is her reinterpretation of Lacan’s notion about the subject’s paranoid knowledge, better describes how subjects become socioideologically coerced into reiterating the received

norms from society. Judith Butler's theory about the materiality of the signifier avidly illustrates how language, materiality, and reality are interpretable and thereby re-signifiable by human subjects. In this sense, Butler's theory shows how abjection – although a social primer – becomes a path in which subjects can negotiate and synthesize the disparities that they encounter and displace the sedimentation of phallogocentric signifieds in the process.

These are the ideas that have inspired my theory about the dialectic of naturalization. Although the dialectic of naturalization is essentially a dialectical materialist philosophy as it emphasizes the interpretability of the world, it also strives to show how concepts become *naturalized*, or, socially intelligible as a result of their *ostensible naturalness*. Because the naturalization of concepts often results in the sedimentation and condensation of those concepts, the dialectic of naturalization depicts how subjects are constrained by the world that precedes them and by the mental permanence of their differentiated perceptions. In other words, the dialectic of naturalization is a theory about coercion and freedom, restriction and negotiation, as the Otherness of language and the regulatory powers of society are greater than the subject, but nevertheless depend on the subject for their continued existence.

The dialectic of naturalization illustrates how the external powers of language and society hold a greater sway over the subject when the subject becomes the automaton that Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish*. When the reiteration of socially-constructed sedimentations occurs – and for that matter, continuously occurs – the differentiated perceptions of subjects become more uniform in order to adhere to those ideals. The reiteration of socially-constructed sedimentations ostracizes those subjects who are capable of maintaining their differentiated

perceptions in spite of social mandates. Hence, the dialectic of naturalization addresses the social exigency of regulatory coercions, as it shows how the reiteration of social prescriptions are at odds with the phenomenologies of abjection, reinterpretation, re-conceptualization, and re-signification. Hence, the dialectic of naturalization demonstrates the ways in which subjects can resist and subvert the regulatory powers of society. The dialectic of naturalization reveals that reductive and prescriptive dichotomies are nevertheless confused and conglomerated concepts, as subjects are constantly grafting new interpretations and new concepts onto received social norms when trying to make sense of the material world that precedes them. In this sense, the dialectic of naturalization – as compelled by a phallogocentric ideology – produces what appears to be masculine and feminine subjects through language and the regulatory powers of society by coercing subjects to reiterate and recirculate phantasmic performances in an attempt to obscure the already transgendered status of subjects.

The transgendered subject is the human subject, and it is only through the realization of the subject's already transgendered status that reductive – and detrimental – concepts and ideologies can become displaced. Because the transgendered subject transcends gender norms, it has the ability to empathize, to innovate and to synthesize, and to re-signify the world according to the standards of universality and humanitarianism. Although there may be truth to Lacan's belief that altruism always promotes self-interest, exercising one's self-interest in order to ensure the well-being and inclusion of others is a worthy cause.

Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* strives to imagine the ways in which this effort could materialize. *Sexing the Cherry* has often been interpreted as Winterson's effort to do away

with reality and convention for her blatant subversion of gender, time, history, authority, and narrative. However, rather than denying reality or convention, Winterson's novel explores the practices of abjection, re-conceptualization, and re-signification in a world that is deeply rooted within the conventions of a heteronormative and phallogocentric reality. Indeed, Winterson overtly – maybe even a tad heavy-handedly – depicts the ways in which her twentieth-century characters are coerced by the regulatory powers of society and she illustrates how those coercions become allegorized in the inner world of the seventeenth century. Because it is in the inner world of the seventeenth century that the inner identities, Jordan and the Dog-Woman, try to overcome the regulatory powers of society in an attempt to discover and maintain their differentiated perceptions, Winterson does not depict her characters as absolute subjects who are free from regulatory powers, but she depicts the constraints that manifest between her characters' coerced constructions and the permanence of their differentiated perceptions.

In this sense, Winterson dramatizes what Lacan has referred to as “the inexhaustible squaring of the ego's audits,” and what the dialectic of naturalization via the rotational properties of the number *i* depicts: the mental permanence of the specular *I* and perseverance of the inner identity's differentiated perception is nevertheless resistant to the very structures that give rise to its intelligibility.³⁵⁸ Winterson even toys with Lacan's notion about the neurosis and psychosis that emerges from the position of the absolute subject: Jordan, seeking an essential self as the inner identity of Nicolas Jordan, and hence, further alienating himself from reality and others, goes mad. However, rather than portraying Nicolas/Jordan's resistance to the regulatory powers

³⁵⁸ Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), 78.

of society as resulting in his complete disintegration into a state of social unintelligibility, Winterson shows how it is other subjects that must save the abject subject from the realm of social abjection and disenfranchisement, as Jordan is ultimately saved by the Dog-Woman which allows him to be “brought home” to Nicolas in the social domain.

Hence, Winterson does not write characters who are free from the reality of the world or their coerced construction, but she grounds her characters in the sedimentation of those constructions while illustrating how the perseverance of her characters’ differentiated perceptions becomes the avenue in which the languages and ideologies that fabricate reality and truth can be displaced. Indeed, by reiterating scenes in which her characters come together, as Jordan returns to the Dog-Woman and Nicolas seeks out the chemist, Winterson illustrates that it is through the collective, yet proliferative, reinterpretation and re-signification of received social norms that allows the sedimentation of phallogocentrism to become displaced. In this way, Winterson implies that abjection, reinterpretation, and re-signification can only take place through the proliferative yet collective effort of subjects.

Because the theories and ideologies that reiterate normative gender categories perpetuate a hierarchy in which the representations offered through language unevenly distribute power to certain subjects while disenfranchising others through objectification and abjection, the need to transgender the body in order to upset that reiterative practice becomes imperative. By transgenerating the body through the dialectic of naturalization, the proliferative individuality that would manifest would put an end to the heteronormative practice of hiding in plain sight, as hegemonic norms would cease to exist. Through the re-appropriation of the dialectic of

naturalization, not only will non-normative genders be reclaimed from abjection and women from objectification and passivity, but heteronormative existences would also be released from the “prison of the body.”

Because heteronormative performances of gender exhibit nothing more than the programmability of the body, the heteronormative body is nothing more than a cog in the service of a much larger machine. Winterson, through the Dog-Woman, expresses the boredom of such an idea: “With everyone in accord, what merriment is there?”³⁵⁹ Because there is no merriment to be found in a world that is uniform, this world, which is *not fixed, nevertheless continues to preserve a reductive mentality wherein laughing at the faults of others is not simply a condoned practice, but a regulatory practice*. However, by displacing the sedimentation of phallogocentrism and heteronormativity and by naturalizing the transgendered body, the powers of language can be redistributed and the regulatory practices that perpetuate social disenfranchisement will dissipate.

³⁵⁹ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1989), 65.

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