

Chapter One

Representing Difference

In her book, *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler revisits the material in order to problematize again the sex/gender divide. Butler argues that too many feminists see gender as a construction that is grafted onto a material, natural body. However, Butler argues that matter is also an effect of governing norms. It is not something that precedes the regulation of the subject; rather, it too is subject to such regulations. In fact, Butler argues that the belief in the naturalness of sex is a key component of the regulatory law that attempts to police bodies/sexes that do not conform to the law. Thus, a belief that sex is given in nature, not culture, is evidence that the law is effective.

This chapter examines positions like Butler's, which are exemplary of a poststructuralist/historicist view of subjectivity, along with an alternative Lacanian position, exemplified by Joan Copjec, in order to examine the relationship between representation, signification, and the material. Feminists appear to be trapped within a false dichotomy: either we view matter (the body) as an effect of discourse and its regulatory power, which is forever subject to representations imposed from without, or we must believe that the body has a prediscursive materiality or essence that escapes signification. Thus, accordingly, for Butler sexual difference "is never simply a function of material differences which are not in some way both marked and formed by discursive practices."¹ This is true even when these practices mark those bodies that exceed the law, when they

not only produce the domain of intelligible bodies, but produce as well a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies. This latter domain is not the opposite of the former, for oppositions are, after all, part of intelligibility; the latter is the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former

domain as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside.²

In part, this dichotomy turns on the distinction and relation between the Real and the Symbolic. This chapter argues that a productive way out of the impasse raised by representation and its limit is to imagine the Real not as an effect of discursive production, either as its retroactive positing (the poststructuralist position) or as signification's limit (the Lacanian position), but as of an order entirely separate from representation. This is possible if we mark a distinction between representation and signification. In doing so we might approach the possibility for thinking an ontology that does not require a ground, for an ontology that does not depend on a prior grounding is one in which sexual and racial difference can be thought.

A nongrounded metaphysics opens us to the possibility of authentic Being-in-the-world and a relation of ethical difference with a racial and sexual Other. For Lacan there can be no Other of the Other because there is no certainty or truth outside the metonymic chain of signification, and signification in the Symbolic is inseparable from representation. In order to imagine alterity as positivity, then, we must get beyond the circuit of representation. For sexual and racial difference to be thought ontologically we must imagine the possibilities for thinking matter not prediscursively but prerepresentationally, not beyond signification but beyond representation.

My attempt to think sexual and racial difference and matter outside representation is not to abandon or foreclose the material body, threatening its erasure again. Nor is it viable simply to mark the place of the beyond as the unspeakable limit of figuration, which I would argue is the position arrived at by both poststructuralist and psychoanalytic critics alike, despite the difference of approach. By taking account of the possibility that signification takes places prior to the Symbolic, it is possible to see that viewing the body beyond representation does not rob the body of meaning. Instead, it recognizes the multiplicity of meanings that the body is capable of effecting prior to the representations it must accord with upon entering the Symbolic. Attending to the materiality of the Real is the first step in establishing the ethical relationship. This involves a two-pronged approach. First we need to look at the material body that is represented in and by the law—what we might call the Symbolic or representational body—and the material body which escapes the law—the excessive, abject, nonrepresentational signifying body.³ An ontology which takes sexual and racial difference into account can be realized only if we attend to those bodies which belie representation. I believe that the difficulties inherent in the articulation of metaphysical alterity, a metaphysics

that allows for sexual difference and racial difference, are resolved through these transgressive signifying bodies. It is a signifying material language, rather than a transcendental representative language, that provides an opportunity for ontological becoming in and through an ethical relation with an Other.

Sexual Difference

Difference feminists, such as Irigaray, Trinh, Cixous, and Kristeva, although they differ in their method, advocate the importance of a reclamation of a woman's body because woman is absent from the patriarchal Symbolic. The Symbolic, they argue, is governed by a phallogomorphic economy in which a woman's morphological and sexual specificity is unrepresented. According to Kristeva, woman is a

voice without body, body without voice . . . cut off forever from the rhythmic, colourful violent changes that streak sleep, skin, viscera: socialized, even revolutionary, but at the cost of her body . . . under the symbolic weight of a law (paternal, familial, social, divine) of which she is the sacrificed support, bursting with glory on the condition that she submit to the denial, if not the murder, of the body.⁴

Because woman is represented only in the gaps and fissures of her repression, she appears fragmented, incoherent, piecemeal. According to Cixous, woman is "ever caught in her chain of metaphors, metaphors that organize culture . . . ever her moon to the masculine sun, nature to culture, concavity to masculine convexity, matter to form, immobility/inertia to the march of progress, terrain trod by the masculine footstep, vessel."⁵ It is in the "traces of a culture,"⁶ the fragments and the debris unsymbolized by the white, masculine Symbolic economy, and in the unconscious matter, the repressed material where the "lesser halves" of binaries like mind/body, reason/passion, white/black, man/woman, penis/vagina, meaning/nonsense are relegated by the philosophers, that feminists of difference seek "woman" (although the term is necessarily a catachresis: "For to speak *of* or *about* woman may always boil down to, or be understood as, a recuperation of the feminine within a logic that maintains it in repression, censorship, non recognition").⁷

The morphology of the Other is excluded from the Symbolic constitution of the subject because that nonsignified presence is required as nonpresence, as the container, the "receptacle for the (re)production of sameness,"⁸ or envelope for the white man's existence:

I was your house. And, when you leave, abandoning this dwelling place, I do not know what to do with these walls of mine. Have I ever had a body other than the one which you constructed according to your idea of it? Have I ever experienced a skin other than the one which you wanted me to dwell within?⁹

Woman is, according to the psychoanalytic model, the place of excess, that which is necessarily excluded in the formation of the male's subjectivity. What we think of as woman is merely a phallogomorphic construct, hence no woman at all, merely a specular woman, an "other of the same." According to Irigaray, woman is divided: she is both specular "for she can only be known and recognized under disguises that denature her; she borrows forms that are never her own and that she must yet mimic if she is to enter even a little way into knowledge" and excessive: "*As for the rest*, it lies buried under the earth, deep down in dark caves where all is shadow and oblivion. And to which we will need to return one day. But by what path?"¹⁰

In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon argues that the black man does not experience his body in a phenomenological way, that is, through its extension in space and time, but rather is given his body by a white inter-spectator. Interpellated by the phrase, "'Dirty nigger!' Or simply, 'Look, a Negro!'" the corporeal schema of the black body does not develop on its own but is instead "sealed into that crushing objecthood . . . The movements, the attitudes, the glances of the others fixed [him] there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye."¹¹ The black subject has his own idea of himself, but that idea is profoundly altered through the failure of identification that takes place when he encounters the white metropole. Furthermore, it is not just the idea of himself that is altered, but his actual physical self appears to undergo a change. "My body is given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recoloured."¹²

Essential to the project of sexual and racial difference, then, is to make visible the excessive material bodies of which both Irigaray and Fanon speak. It is not enough merely to mark the place of this excessive materiality as the unknowable realm of the Other. Rather, for raced and sexed corporeality to be taken into account, it must be capable of signification beyond the prevailing representative economy. The poststructuralist position views it as catachrestic to posit such an unintelligible body, for to posit it is in a sense to know it and thus to render it an effect of not a precursor to discourse. In Butler's view, for example, "once 'sex' itself is understood in its normativity, the materiality of the body will not be thinkable apart from the materialization of that regulatory norm."¹³ The Lacanian position by contrast argues that although the matter of the

Symbolic body's sex is produced and regulated, this need not preclude the possibility of imagining a form of matter that lies outside discursive regulation. As I will argue in chapter 2, the character of Dil in Neil Jordan's film *The Crying Game* functions as an example of a body that exposes the mechanics of discursive material regulation, and at the same time demonstrates the possibility for sexual and racial signification at a material level beyond these regulatory laws. Indeed, the theorization of sexual and racial difference and the possibility of an ethical relation of difference depend on an understanding of the materiality of those excessive bodies that are repressed in the making of the sexed and raced subject. In my view, the answer to the problem of materiality is not that theorizing the constructedness of race and sex somehow disavows or negates the essence of the material body—the critique typically leveled at Butler—but that too rigid a focus on the body's constructedness suggests a failure to take account of material significations outside of these constructions. It is this forgotten signifying materiality that can open us to authentic Being-in-the-world through an ethical relation with the Other.

Are There Women Really?

Understanding the question of representation and its limit involves taking account of the relation between the Symbolic and the Real. Although the Real underpins the ordering of the Symbolic, it has no existence separate from our interpretation of it. As Slavoj Žižek makes clear, "The Real is an entity which must be constructed afterwards so that we can account for the distortions of the symbolic structure. . . . The paradox of the Lacanian Real, then, is that it is an entity which, although it does not exist (in the sense of 'really existing,' taking place in reality), has a series of properties—it exercises a certain structural causality, it can produce a series of effects in the symbolic reality of subjects."¹⁴ The Real, like woman and her *jouissance*, is impossible, unrepresentable, but can be seen to signify the possibility of an ontology outside of representation. By examining Lacan's Real and the issue of representation, I hope to demonstrate how we can imagine an ontology of sexual difference that does not posit a ground for its own representation. According to Lacan, the subject's acquisition of a sexed identity is dependent on the acquisition of language. Language's key function is its capacity to represent, giving the subject a means by which to articulate desire; representation enables the subject to substitute for the insatiable Other. Everything in the Symbolic is founded on the split or division of language itself. A thing exists in the Symbolic only insofar as it is symbolizable, is a function of language. On this

reading, language is founded on division, the perpetual cut between the signifier and the signified, and any act of symbolization necessarily fails. It can only approximate a relation to that which is represented; the thing itself recedes and exceeds any attempt at its symbolization.

Representative language operates through this constant slippage between the sign and its referent and its symbolization through metonymic and metaphoric relations to other signs. Sexuality is also subject to this slippage and division inherent in representation. Woman, unlike man, has a particular relationship to symbolization and the failures of representation. On this Lacanian model, her sexuality is nothing more than a representation of herself as the object of his desire. And her desire to be the object of his desire can only be realized through artifice, the masquerade, dissimulation. The slippage inherent in symbolization holds interesting possibilities for the woman, then, because no presence can be represented for her if her identity is in itself a symbolization, a mask. What is revealed instead, in the slippage of language, is an unconstituted, unsymbolizable lack.

The concept of the symbolic states that the woman's sexuality is inseparable from the representations through which it is produced . . . but those very representations will reveal the splitting through which they are constituted as such. The question of what a woman is in this account always stalls on the crucial acknowledgment that she *is* at all. But if she takes up her place according to the process described, then her sexuality will betray, necessarily, the impasses of its own history.¹⁵

The question of woman's existence, her status as the "not all" raised by Lacan relates directly to the issue of representation. According to Jacqueline Rose, this marks a shift in Lacan's work from woman's place as object of exchange to object in language, a shift that also reveals the link between sexuality and language:

Woman is constructed as an absolute category (excluded and elevated at one and the same time), a category which serves to guarantee that unity on the side of the man. The man places the woman at the basis of his fantasy, or constitutes fantasy through the woman. Lacan moved away, therefore from the idea of a problematic but socially assured process of exchange (women as objects) to the construction of woman as a category within language (woman as *the* object, the fantasy of her definition). What is now exposed in the account is "a carrying over onto the woman of the difficulty inherent in sexuality" itself.¹⁶

This “difficulty” is that sexuality is bounded by the limits of representation. For Lacan, “sexuality is the vanishing point of meaning” because there can be no sexual relation when desire is always directed beyond the object which represents its desire.¹⁷ Thus woman, too, even in her circumscription by language and representation, vanishes with every attempt to capture her. “It none the less remains that if she is excluded by the nature of things, it is precisely that in being not all, she has, in relation to what the phallic function designates of *jouissance*, a supplementary *jouissance*.”¹⁸ Woman’s sexuality exceeds representation; it is supplementary. Her pleasure should not be confused with desire, however, because desire is a property of the Symbolic and its lack. Women’s pleasure is elsewhere, outside of the phallic economy of the Symbolic. It is a “*jouissance* of the body which is, if the expression be allowed, *beyond the phallus*.”¹⁹ For Lacan, woman’s *jouissance* exists but she cannot access it. It is the mark of the possibility of her pleasure though one forever denied her in the Symbolic. Thus we can see it on the face of Bernini’s statue of St. Teresa and in the writings of certain mystics. Lacan raises the question as to whether the “expression be allowed” precisely because to name something beyond the phallus is to locate it outside the Symbolic order, which means that it cannot be named. How then can we interpret a woman’s sexuality?

In marking the limit of representation woman’s sexuality demonstrates new possibilities for thinking the question of matter and its relation to sexual difference. For Lacan the impossibility of woman to be the Other, to satiate desire, is the impossibility of the Symbolic. This structural impossibility is why there can be, for Lacan, no Other of the Other, because such alterity cannot exist in the Symbolic. Any attempt to think difference, then, should interrogate the possibilities of sexuality as the “vanishing point of meaning,” to think sexual difference outside of representation. This is further evident in Lacan’s association of *jouissance* with *signifiance*,²⁰ which Rose explains is the slippage within language, “the movement in language against, or away from, the positions of coherence which language simultaneously constructs.”²¹ Lacan suggests that *jouissance* exposes the limits of the material body. In the Symbolic there is no sexual relation because men and women cannot satisfy each other’s desire: “short of something which says no to the phallic function, man has no chance of enjoying the body of the woman, in other words, of making love.”²² Her body exists outside this economy, then, and can only be glimpsed through the slippage in language, through the gaps in representation. Hence the paradox: “There is a *jouissance* proper to her, to this ‘her’ which does not exist and which signifies nothing. There is a *jouissance* proper to her and of which she herself may know nothing, except that she experiences it—that much she does know.”²³ Her body experiences the pleasure that cannot be contained by language.

Thus even though “*jouissance* is the basis upon which symbolization works, the basis emptied, disembodied, structured by the symbolization,” as Žižek makes clear “this process produces at the same time a residue, a leftover, which is the surplus-enjoyment.”²⁴ For Lacan there is no identity outside the Symbolic and it is not possible to view *jouissance* as evidence of a prerepresentational subjectivity. However, I would argue that the association between an unsymbolizable *jouissance* and the woman’s body suggests the possibilities for thinking matter outside of representation, a *jouissance*, hence a body “beyond the phallus.”²⁵

It is important to acknowledge, of course, that Lacan sees the failure inherent in Symbolic representation as the very condition of subjectivity, the lack without which no representation, hence no subjectivity, is possible. “The subject tries to articulate itself in a signifying representation; the representation fails; instead of a richness we have a lack, and this void opened by the failure *is* the subject of the signifier.”²⁶ However to read the failure of representation as its effect is to remain tied to an economy of representation. It is to posit the unsymbolizable Real as the ground of representation. To recuperate this Real would simply recuperate the metaphysics of presence that an alterior ontology seeks to subvert. In order to imagine difference at an ontological level we need to understand the break with representation not on its own terms as a lack, but as a positivity, of an arena entirely separate from representation and its effects, though not, as I will argue, separate from signification. An ethical relation with the Other as Other, which is an integral component to authentic Being-in-the-world, is possible only beyond an economy of representation and its lack. As a consequence, an ethical relation with the Other must be itself unrepresentable; we need to get beyond the epistemological to embrace the ontological. I would argue that such an approach is possible if we rethink the relation between matter and representation. It is only when matter ceases to be read in terms of a representational economy that we can imagine the fundamental ontology imagined by Heidegger and the ethical relation with the Other articulated by Irigaray and Fanon.

Lacan himself highlights the link between matter and representation and sexual difference, stating that when philosophy tries to think the relationship of form to matter—with its positioning of women on the side of passive, inert matter and men on the side of the active form—it is merely attempting to account for the absence of the sexual relation: “It is visibly, palpably the case that these propositions are only upheld by a fantasy of trying to make up for what there is no way of stating that is, the sexual relation.”²⁷ As we have seen, for Lacan the sexual relation does not exist because it cannot exist in the Symbolic order: “the sexual relation founders in

non-sense.”²⁸ There is no possibility for a relation between the sexes because there is no way of stating this relation; the sexual relation simply cannot be in the realm of representation. It follows therefore that the possibility of a sexual relation and thus an ethical relation is possible only if we think outside the form/matter binary. In this way a relation between the Other of the Other can be attempted, which can bring us to Being itself.

Real Sex

In her book *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*, Joan Copjec attempts to explicate the problem of existence and its relationship to representation, which is central to Lacan’s theory of the Symbolic. Taking issue with Foucault and Foucauldian-inspired theory, Copjec argues that the “historicists” fail to take account of the kind of existence that is unknowable, “an existence without predicate, or, to put it differently, of a surplus existence that cannot be caught up in the positivity of the social.”²⁹ The world and all of us in it cannot be reduced to social relations or linguistic constructs. We need to be able to get outside the system in order to understand it; “some notion of transcendence,” Copjec argues, “is plainly needed if one is to avoid the reduction of social space to the relations that fill it.”³⁰ Such a principle is found in Lacan’s conception of the Real. Copjec argues that the Real is that space that marks the possibility of existence without delivering knowledge of that existence to us. The Real cannot be thematized or historicized or figured. It remains forever out of reach, escaping all attempts to represent it, but is there nevertheless as that which makes the Symbolic with its social relations and linguistic structures possible at all.

Copjec’s view of the Real is significant for this argument about representation and materiality, because sex, according to Copjec, is formed in the Real. Not only does she take issue with Foucault’s and others’ assertion that sex is discursively produced, she suggests that it has no relationship to discourse at all. Sex is a stable, untouchable extradiscursive fact. This view of sex clearly runs counter to that view espoused by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*. Indeed, in her chapter “Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason,” Copjec critiques Butler’s definition of sex as an unstable category. Sex, Copjec argues, is not in itself unstable or influx; its meaning just cannot be located within language. The debate between Copjec and Butler is instructive for our purposes because it concerns representation and its limits. Copjec accuses Butler of failing to mark the distinction between the *term* woman and the *being* woman. Copjec claims not to want to posit a prediscursive realm for sex; however, she does not view the relationship between sex and signification as a legible one. Instead “it

is only where discursive practices falter—and not at all where they succeed in producing meaning—that sex comes to be.”³¹ In pointing to language’s limits, Copjec hopes to reveal the nature of representationality: its inherent inability to render or represent. Every act of representation necessarily participates in the fiction of representation. By its very nature, a representation claims to be representative, but all it represents is in fact the impossibility of representation, because a representation cannot contain the thing represented.

It is significant to point out, as she makes clear in *Bodies That Matter*, that Butler does not dispute the idea of a sexual outside or remainder that cannot be contained by representation. However, she does not view this outside as a stable, though unrecoverable, entity residing in the Real. Rather, Butler views this excluded outside to be the necessary condition for representation: “A constitutive or relative outside is, of course, composed of a set of exclusions that are nevertheless *internal* to that system as its own nonthematizable necessity.”³² That which exceeds representation is a necessary component of the system of representation. It is not part of a separate order; it doesn’t escape representation, such as Copjec’s reading of sex in the Real suggests. Rather, its existence is integral to representation. It is a part of the Symbolic, not of the Real.

Copjec claims that Butler is disputing the “truth” of the universal category “woman” because the category excludes class and racial variations of women, which are collapsed into a false universal. This implies that Butler imagines that a subject “woman” could exist which could properly account for all of these differences. However Butler does not want to erect a new category of woman in place of the old, that is, a better, more inclusive universal. She wants rather to interrogate the claims of the category, any category, however redefined, to be representative. Any definition of woman as subject is discursively produced. Both the universal and the particular are fictions because they are subject to representation. Thus, like Copjec, Butler considers woman to be marked by representation and its failure. For Butler this results in an instability, the always already failure of representation that creates the instability of every category, including sex. “To think of ‘sex’ as an imperative in this way means that a subject is addressed and produced by such a norm, and that this norm—and the regulatory power of which it is a token—materializes bodies as an effect of that injunction. And yet, this ‘materialization,’ while far from artificial, is not fully stable.”³³

If woman is caught in representation and its failure, then sexual difference is beset by the same problems. Copjec argues that sexual difference is not a positive term, and does not point to something known; rather, it is the failure of our knowledge, an indicator of the not-known. According

to Copjec, because *jouissance* is experienced in the Real, where there is no lack, we are sexed there in that moment of impossibility. The Symbolic merely renders the impossibility of our sex knowable, but does not in itself confer on us our sexual identities. Copjec's reading of sex in the Real has important implications for woman. Because, according to Lacan, woman has a privileged relationship to *jouissance* and this pleasure, this sex, occurring outside the parameters of the Symbolic, can never be known, woman's existence is called into question. Copjec uses the logic of the Kantian antinomy of the nonexistence of the world, that is, the world cannot be reduced to the phenomena by which we experience it and there are phenomena which we cannot experience, and therefore know. Thus, "the world is not a possible object of experience" to support the Lacanian idea that woman does not exist. According to Lacan, "In order to say 'it exists,' it is also necessary to be able to construct it, that is to say, to know how to find where this existence is." Because woman's *jouissance* lies outside of the Symbolic order of language, her nonexistence merely refers to her unlocateability within representation, and this unlocateability results in her unknowability. She exists, is stable, but her existence is unknowable: "what becomes impossible, is the rendering of a judgment of existence."³⁴ Her existence cannot be located if it resides outside representation.

Butler, like Copjec, agrees that the mechanics of representation involve its failure; however, these mechanics do not reveal a stable sex existing in an untouchable Real, as in Copjec's account, but rather actively produce an unstable sex. All categories of identity, according to Butler, are produced in and through discursive practices. All subjects are inherently unknowable if we contend that they are constructed according to certain prohibitions, because the prohibition only allows for the subject to be known according to its laws. For Butler this regulatory ideal extends to a construction of a difference between the sexes insofar as "the conventions that demarcate sexual difference determine in part what we 'see' and 'comprehend' as sexual difference."³⁵ Sexual difference, in Butler's view, cannot be found in some stable Real existing somewhere beyond the Symbolic. Sexual difference is nothing other than an effect of representation. To some degree this debate boils down to a psychoanalytic versus poststructuralist view of the production of the sexed subject.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, there is a primary prohibition, the law against incest, which regulates the subject's acquisition of its sex. Men and women are not sexed prior to the institution of this Law because they only take up a sexed identity in relation to the phallus, and the phallus is the instrument of the Law. The Law governs through fear and punishment and is effective because all unlawful desire is repressed in the unconscious. The unconscious always threatens to destabilize the Law; thus, the Law is

strictly and punitively enforced. By contrast, in a Foucauldian framework, there is no moment that can mark the institution of the Law; there is no before or after the Law. Indeed there is no singular defining Law but rather various loci of power: power-knowledge formations that produce subjects as sexed through discourse and then regulate the sex of the subject. Some of these are juridical and prohibitive, like Lacan's Law, and are imposed on us, but others we embrace and reproduce willingly (gender and sex for Butler), and through these we constitute our subjectivity. There is no outside of sex, therefore; no sex and identity before power constitutes us as such. But importantly, unlike in Lacanian psychoanalysis, nor is there an existent at the level of the Real, before language, before the subject. The subject is born into relations of power, the family being one of power's primary agents for the deployment and regulation of sexuality.

For Butler, like Foucault, whose theories inform much of Butler's work, there is no subject outside the juridical systems that produce it. There is no before the Law as there is for Lacan's subject, but rather the subject is produced in and through the Law. There is no existing before the Law, even an existence that is, on Copjec's reading, impossible to articulate. Indeed, according to Butler "the invocation of a temporal 'before' is constituted by the law as the fictive foundation of its own claim to legitimacy."³⁶ According to Butler, this view of the subject is central to any attempt to articulate a theory of a feminist subject and any account of a feminist praxis that would follow from that subject's articulation. On this model the "feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation."³⁷ Woman as 'being'—body/sex/matter—cannot exist apart from woman as 'term'—discursive construct—because the feminist subject is part of the heterosexual matrix that governs the Law and that produces a binary opposite masculine subject. Thus the juridical prohibitions of this system allow only certain bodies—sexes, subjects—sanctioned by the Law, to exist. A feminist subject that could function as a possible candidate for a truly anterior feminism is forever excluded from the current model. The term woman *is* the being woman in an economy where beings exist only as they are defined through power structures.

However, Butler does not imagine that the real feminist subject is present beyond these structures of power. Instead, she argues for a questioning of identity categories in toto: "the *impossibility* of an identity category to fulfill that promise [of representation] is a consequence of a set of exclusions which found the very subjects whose identities such categories are supposed to phenomenalyze and represent."³⁸ The problems of exclusion that have beset the subject of feminism heretofore is a problem with the system that assumes representation requires fixed categories of identity: a stable subject. Butler imagines

means other than the formulation of a representational subject—woman—by which feminism can represent its constituents: women. Until we can do this there is no Real woman who exists beyond her categorization as “woman.” And any potential *jouissance* that exists outside the Symbolic as proof of a Real woman, or a stable sex, is nothing more than the system’s own necessary exclusion. Thus, for Butler this association of woman with a pre-significatory realm is simply a necessary effect of representation. Woman does not occupy the unknowable place ontologically; rather, she is thrust there through a mechanics of discourse and representation.

Viewed in these terms, Copjec’s critique is effective in exposing precisely the mechanics of representation that Butler sees to be at work. Indeed, the idea of woman’s stability raises a key issue. We could read the stability, as Butler does, as instability, for this stability is merely constructed by representation and its limit as the constitutive outside. Any positing of a stable Real is meaningless in a discursive world where access to the Real can occur only through representation, which, bounded as it is by its own limit, is always marked by instability. Thus it is clear that the question of stability is tied to the problem of representation. The issue of stability versus instability arises because we cannot represent, thus know or define, matter that is outside the Symbolic. For Copjec it has no meaning and it is disjoined from all signification.

However, what if we were to imagine matter, a body, that is capable of signification without representation, a body that makes its own meaning? Butler would argue that we cannot because even if we acknowledge an incommensurability between the body and language, we cannot attribute to the body an ontology separate from language: “The body escapes its linguistic grasp, but so too does it escape the subsequent effort to determine ontologically that very escape. The very description of the extralinguistic body allegorizes the problem of the chiasmic relation between language and body and so fails to supply the distinction it seeks to articulate.” But this is a problem with representation, not signification. For Butler, as we have seen, representation posits its own outside as a condition of representation. Thus any attempt to engage with a material body outside of representation is impossible because it is always already part of the representational economy. “The body does not, then, imply the destruction of figurality if only because a figure can function as a substitution for that which is fundamentally irrecoverable within or by the figure itself.”³⁹ But figuration can only occur if the thing figured *can be figured*. Butler cannot conceive of a body that resists figuration because it is literally inconceivable; were such a body able to be conceived, it would be subject to figuration and thus demonstrate the impossibility of its inconceivability. Copjec, on the other hand, performs the catachresis of conceiving of the inconceivable body. She argues that there is a type of existence

which “is subject *only* to a judgment of existence; we can say only that it does or does not exist, without being able to say what it is, to describe it in any way.”⁴⁰ Thus, she posits the possibility of a body, a sex, that resists representation, but for her such a body cannot signify, because there can be no signification without representation, without the Symbolic.

In subsequent chapters, I will demonstrate not only that material signification is possible, but that it is a necessary component in realizing authentic Being-in-the-world and an ethical relation of complete alterity. If, as we shall see, ontology is revealed to be ethics, then signification is the vehicle, the language, seen as indispensable by Heidegger, Irigaray, and Fanon to the disclosing of that relationship.

The Psychoanalysis of Race

Whereas the acquisition of sexed identity has preoccupied psychoanalysis for decades, far less attention has been paid to the role that race plays in subject formation.⁴¹ But as Jean Walton argues,

If a Lacanian notion of the symbolic is to be of any use at all, aside from the question of whether it may be socially accessed in some way . . . it must include the recognition that even as the body is sexed through its insertion into the symbolic, it is necessarily also raced through the same process.⁴²

What is the relationship between sexual and racial difference, then, and how can an articulation of this relationship help us account for the material body and the limits of representation?

Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks attempts to answer this question by applying Lacan’s explanation of sexual difference to a reading of racial difference. If the phallus is the master signifier of sexual difference, Seshadri-Crooks argues that racial difference is also organized and regulated by a master signifier analogous to the phallus: “Whiteness.” Racial difference is however, according to Seshadri-Crooks, fundamentally distinct from sexual difference. Whereas sexual difference is forever marked in the Symbolic by lack, racial difference is not founded on lack but functions to fill the lack produced in the sexed subject. Indeed, the reason racial difference exists at all, argues Seshadri-Crooks, is to compensate for sexual difference’s lack. Thus “the order of racial difference attempts to compensate for sex’s failure in language. . . . The signifier Whiteness tries to fill the constitutive lack of the sexed subject. It promises a totality an overcoming of difference itself.”⁴³

Seshadri-Crooks does identify an analogy between the Law of the Father (the taboo against incest) and the Racial Law (the taboo against miscegenation). Both laws are cultural laws insofar as the subject is

forced to conform to them. However, according to Seshadri-Crooks, the Racial Law is wholly cultural. Seshadri-Crooks's analysis of racial difference has bearing on this discussion of the relationship between representation and matter because she relies heavily on Joan Copjec's reading of sexual difference as occurring at the level of the Real. As we have seen, Copjec considers sexual difference to be formed in the Real because it is here that *jouissance* is possible and must be abandoned as a condition of entry into the Symbolic. The difference, then, between what Seshadri-Crooks calls the Moral Law (the taboo against incest) and the Racial Law is that unlike sexual difference, racial difference is formed wholly within the Symbolic. There is no lack at the level of the Real that is being accounted for in the Symbolic by the racial subject.

Insofar as the racial law is purely symbolic, to be a raced subject is to be symbolically determined. The racial symbolical cannot be said to be missing a signifier. Rather it supplies a master signifier (Whiteness) that appears in the place of the object of desire (that must remain absent for desire to be possible). Insofar as it is purely symbolical, the racial "law" cannot in itself bespeak the subject's, or more properly the body's, potential for that Other *jouissance*, which emerges at the site of a lack in the symbolic order.⁴⁴

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the schema offered by Seshadri-Crooks. The first is her assumption that there is no place for race in the Real. Race can be understood only as something extra, something added to the subject. It is solely a construction, and, as such, has to be accounted for as a Symbolic difference. Such a view accords with Heidegger's understanding that race is an ontic, rather than an ontological, fact. It is not a property of Being itself, but is instead a secondary acquired difference. Or to stay within a psychoanalytic model, it comes after subject formation. But as we have seen, Fanon's account of racial subjectivity troubles this easy division. For Fanon, race is not just historical, it is material. This is not to say that Fanon argues for an essentialist reading of race, but rather that it is at the material physical level, as well as the social level, that he is inscribed by race.

Because Seshadri-Crooks already reads race as Symbolic, she tautologically asserts that the racial law must be Symbolic and as such has no missing signifier. But this is to presume what she is arguing. How can we assume that the subject does not experience wholeness at the level of race in the Real? Even if we were to accept that race is regulated by the master signifier Whiteness, why is it the case that such a signifier does not correspond to a racial lack at the level of the Real as the phallus does

for the sexed subject? Why must it go through Seshadri Crooks's convoluted method whereby Whiteness is a supplement that is constructed in the Symbolic, because the subject has to account for its lack of lack in the Real, and which is then itself turned into lack because of the subject's inherent inability to cope with wholeness? Furthermore, even if we acknowledge that the Racial Law directs and defines raced subjects, why does that preclude the existence or possibility of raced bodies which exist outside the law? What if we attempted to account for the materiality of race—for phenotype—without assuming a stable, unchanging essential difference at the level of genotype?

Even though woman is defined as other in relation to man in the Symbolic, and her sexual identity is imposed on her upon entering the Symbolic, Lacan acknowledges that woman has a sexual identity prior to that imposition of phallic law. Might there not exist a racial identity prior to the institution of Symbolic Whiteness? As Walton asks, "Is it in fact crucial to tease out the ways in which racial difference, like sexual difference, seems to be confirmed by recourse to the real, to determine precisely the way in which it, too, refuses to budge?"⁴⁵ In this case Whiteness would not be able to fill the lack inherent in us after our break with the Real because race itself would be as implicated in our sense of identity and equally lacking to us upon entry into the Symbolic.

It is certainly true that, as Fanon and others such as Robyn Wiegman argue, racial classifications are rooted in an "economy of visibility." Following Foucault and Collette Guillaumin, Wiegman argues that the organization of knowledge in natural history of the eighteenth century, where objects of study are classified and ordered on the basis of visible differences, resulted in a "strengthening of the corporeal as the bearer of race's meaning."⁴⁶ On this model, racial difference is assigned in the Symbolic through a language of visual representation; it therefore acknowledges the socially constructed aspects of race, but such an observation does not preclude the possibility of non-Symbolic racial identities.

A good portion of *Black Skin White Masks* details the alienation that is experienced by the black man when "fixed" by the gaze of the white man; however, it is not the fact that he is corporeally read as black that is of primary importance here, but that such a reading results in his alienation. Whereas for Lacan, the imago of the mirror stage provides the subject with a fictionally unified self, for Fanon, it is the white man, the other who "becomes this fictional self of the mirror stage" for the black man. In other words, alienation occurs because the black man sees himself as other than black, and indeed, just as the white man does, understands blackness and its attending significations to comprise the imago of his menacing other.⁴⁷ When the white mask slips, it does not reveal an essence

behind the mask, but rather reveals that the black skin behind the mask is itself a mask. The white mask of the black man is akin to the feminine masquerade. As Fanon realizes, the “blackness” of the Symbolic is nothing more or less than a reflection of the attraction/repulsion model of white desire. We could argue that the black man in the Antilles experiences his race in catachresis.

‘Black skins, white masks’ is not, for example, a neat division; it is a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once . . . It is not the Colonialist self of the Colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in between that constitutes the figure of colonial Otherness—the white man’s artifice inscribed on the black man’s body. It is in relation to this impossible object that emerges the liminal problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes.⁴⁸

The ambivalence that Bhabha identifies at the heart of the colonial encounter renders the black man’s race unrepresentable and, in terms of the Symbolic, literally impossible, a *jouissance* beyond the phallus. The meaning of race, like that of sex, exceeds all attempts to fix it. Race too can be seen as the vanishing point of meaning. There is thus a “discontinuity between what one might call the *imaginary physiology of race* and human *genetic diversity*.”⁴⁹ Race should thus be understood as material, because visible, but imaginary, capable of belying the fixity of Symbolic categories. At this imaginary level, race is material but capable of change, and as this visibility occurs at the imaginary level it is change that is prompted through identifications or disidentifications with an Other.⁵⁰ Obviously Fanon’s assessment of the mirror stage is predicated on this kind of visual identification, which haunts the black body through life, but rather than fix or imprison him in the dominant gaze, this visual imaginary encounter, through a disruption of the gaze and a deployment of colonial ambivalence, can give rise to fluid multimorphic material representations.

I would agree with Seshadri-Crooks that the Symbolic attributes meaning to race, but she discounts the possibility for race to have meaning outside the Symbolic. She imagines that signification operates only in and through the Symbolic. Thus, in an explicit departure from Lacan, Seshadri-Crooks argues that even imaginary identification, because it is marked by desire for the other, is really part of the Symbolic.⁵¹ However, because the racial body, like the sexed body, is caught in the network of matter, representation, and signification, if we are to interpret racial difference it is important to consider the distinction between representation and signification. Representation belongs to the order of the Symbolic and, in the case of

race, constitutes a set of preestablished categories or terms. To highlight the distinction between signification and representation is to note the possibility that matter has meaning, but not one that is fixed or predetermined. A model for this kind of signification can be seen outside the Symbolic order in imaginary identification.

In the human world, organisms manage to meet only through their representatives [their projections], through the mediation of their egos (including all the social identifications this entails), so that the imaginary is indeed the pivotal point around which the entire relation of the subject to the organism is denatured, deprived of the regularity that instinct affords in the animal world. This also means that the image no longer opens on a world of reality and no longer functions as a natural perception providing access to the things themselves; rather the image gives rise to representations that *reconfigure* the entire order of intersubjectivity.⁵²

In the imaginary stage, meaning is literally inscribed on the body through imaginary, social, and cultural relations with others. Even though some of these images are cultural, thus originating in the Symbolic, the relation is not marked by lack but by a fantastical belief in the totality and autonomy of the subject's own body and that of the other. Thus the imaginary is wrought with signification but not the kind of signification predicated on lack that is a feature of the Symbolic. The only way to understand the kind of signification that occurs in the imaginary then is to consider the possibility that it is a non-Symbolic signification. This is not to suggest that the Symbolic does not ultimately order those meanings for the subject, thereby instituting lack. Indeed the Symbolic orders and defines the meaning of race quite rigorously. However, we must allow for the possibility that the body can make its own meanings through imaginary identification, and that these meanings are created in and through relations with others. In demonstrating how race is produced through visual representation, Fanon draws our attention to race's textual quality and its capacity for re-signification. If the meanings that society gives back to us are interrupted and if they cease to affirm and consolidate according to a pre-fixed understanding of race as it exists already in the Symbolic, then new meanings for the racial body, new significations, ones that do not participate in, and could not be reduced to, the meanings secured in and through a grounded representation, might be possible.

Seshadri-Crooks's use of Copjec is interesting and provocative. Copjec's argument is significant because we do need to affirm the possibilities of

body/matter existing beyond our ability to represent them. However, rather than using Copjec's theory of sexual difference occurring in the Real to discount the possibility of racial difference at the level of the Real, as Seshadri-Crooks does, I would argue that we should extend Copjec's position to racial difference. Because *jouissance* can be interpreted, not as the failure of signification, but, rather as an indicator of signification outside of representation, as non-Symbolic signification for the sexed body, it can provide us with a way of reading race, not simply Symbolically, but materially.

Certainly if we were to retain a Saussurean model of signification it would appear impossible to imagine its operation outside of the Symbolic. But I would argue that theorizing the possibility of signification at a material level is vital to getting beyond the psychoanalytic and post-structuralist impasse that feminists and race theorists currently confront. A model of material signification allows us to question the impossibility that Butler considers to attend the positing of an extradiscursive object, namely that it "is formed by the very discourse from which it seeks to free itself." Butler takes this view because she is unable to conceive of the possibility of a signifying materiality operable on another plane or register. Butler argues that materiality "is bound up with signification from the start; to think through the indissolubility of materiality and signification is no easy matter."⁵³ But Butler is limited by a conception of materiality that is always already inscribed by the force and normative possibilities of one and only one abiding discourse. To recognize the indissolubility of matter and discourse need not mean that matter accords only to the laws of the prevailing discourse. Indeed, the temporal quality of linguistic construction, whereby construction and its effects are not fixed, but change and indeed, destabilize over time, which is key to Butler's argument, would augur this very possibility. If the body is not acted upon or constructed by an agent or subject—a charge which Butler takes great pains to refute, so as not to reinstall a humanist subject doing the constructing, a sort of master builder—then some possibility of signification must be generated in and by the material substance itself. Just because the law produces bodies that accord to certain sanctioned representations, there is no reason to suppose that other material significations cannot exist simultaneously outside the law and its reach.

What if a body could signify by itself such that it would not require, indeed would resist, an act of representation? Bodies are categorized from the outside—a linguistic act is performed on them by someone or something separate from the body. But if a body could create its own significations, it would not be a passive inert screen upon which representations could be grafted from the outside. Bodies can be subject to representation only if they accord to categories already in place. If the significations the body produced

were not already known outside itself, then we could have a body that signified but could not be represented.

The distinction Jean-François Lyotard makes between discourse and the figural is analogous to the kind of distinction I am making here between representation and signification. For Lyotard, the figural operates in a dimension separate from discourse, for “the figural is the avatar of another order whose relation to space, no less than discourse, is vexed. The figural is unrepresentable, beneath or behind representation, because it operates in another space.”⁵⁴ Drawing on the operations of condensation and displacement at play in dream work, Lyotard locates the figural in the realm of unconscious fantasy and desire. The figural is a transgressive force that disrupts and “exceeds the power of a reflection that wants to signify it, to render it in language.”⁵⁵ The force of primal phantasy and desire is unrepresentable, exceeding the spatial logic of the indexical grid that language requires. Thus “the figural defines a semiotic regime where the ontological distinction between linguistic and plastic representation breaks down.”⁵⁶ For Lyotard, the figural can be seen, if not spoken, and can be articulated or expressed in form. The figural operative in dream-work is a force which “transgresses the law.”⁵⁷ The figural does indeed signify, then, just not within the Law, but outside of it. The figural operates precisely at the level of signification (even though Lyotard himself does not use the term) beyond or separate from representation. The term is less important than an understanding or ability to conceive of the possibility for meaning-making, sense, to exist separate from the Law and its symbolic operations. For Lyotard “argues convincingly that the limit of the Saussurean project—from the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, to Roman Jakobson’s linguistics, and even to the earlier works of Jacques Lacan—was the inability to comprehend the problem of meaning as other than linguistic.”⁵⁸

I would argue that the distinction I make between signification and representation helps us to understand better the nonlinguistic material meanings that the figural can engender. Indeed, the force of desire of primal phantasy, which is written on the body, can be seen to be emblematic of the possibility of bodily signification beyond representation and the Law. It is precisely through the body and the meanings it can produce beyond those that cultural prohibitions articulate for it that Being is revealed and the ethical relation with the sexual or racial Other is possible.

Fanon makes a definite connection between the black man’s material existence and his ontological lack. Fanon attempts to return to the black subject an ontology he has never had. Because “blackness” is wholly Symbolic, the ontology for the racial subject is, like that of the female subject, as yet unknown; it resides elsewhere. The Symbolic with its preformed rep-

representations impedes a proper ontological experience. Indeed, “the unrealizability of ontology signaled in the opening of *l’expérience vécue du Noir* [‘The Fact of Blackness’] stems from its leaving off of the expression of consciousness attending the corporeal schema.”⁵⁹ Hence it would appear that any attempt to theorize an ontology for the racial subject must take the corporeal and its variety of schemas into account; however, this is not possible within a Symbolic order that defines and delimits the “Negro.”

If we mark the distinction between signification and representation, it is possible to imagine meanings for the body which are not subject to representation and its limits. A nonrepresentational body would not require a ground from which to make its own representations, thus allowing the possibility for authentic Being-in-the-world and the ethical relationship. In fact signification might be understood to reside precisely at the point of failure of representation. Lacan’s view of sex as the “vanishing point of meaning” might be reconceived as the vanishing point of representation, a place where an unstable sex and race defy representation through the production of multiple, changing meanings. Viewing signification as separate from representation allows us to ask the following questions: Is there matter outside representation? Is there a way of conceiving of the Real without a retroactive positing? Is there a way to view the underside of representation, the excess of symbolization, as other than the constitutive outside? Can there be signification without representation? Is it possible to intervene between poststructuralist and Lacanian positions and imagine a material ontology which is unstable and outside representation? And ultimately, what might such an ontology suggest for an ethical relation with the other? In the following chapter, I will argue that Neil Jordan’s *The Crying Game*, if read in light of the psychoanalytic theory of imaginary identification, demonstrates how a body can signify beyond representative categories. In subsequent chapters, I will argue that these signifying bodies have the potential to experience authentic Being-in-the-world and to initiate that experience with an Other. It is the signifying body that can trigger the Heideggerian call of conscience that can disrupt a representational ontology. First, however, it is necessary to establish the possibilities for these bodies to signify beyond representation.