

## **Julia Kristeva, 'woman's primary homosexuality' and Homophobia**

The question of female homosexuality permeates Julia Kristeva's entire oeuvre. Yet, she has written very little on the subject of 'lesbianism'. Indeed, there is no text, article, essay nor interview dedicated to an examination of the topic. The discreet but omnipresent question of women's homosexual desire can partly be explained as the consequence of Kristeva's self-confessed repression of the homosexual object:

I have chanced to note that when analysands of either sex made their love known to me, [...] it involved men and women who called themselves homosexual [...] Why homosexuals? Could they have guessed an uneasiness on my part in dealing with their uneasiness about a subjugating mother, precociously and encroachingly loving, abandoned or abiding, but always underhandedly fascinating? Do they set up, in my place, instead of an object of love, my own preciously lost love? Probably. (Kristeva, 1987: 11).

Critics like Kelly Oliver (1997) have rightfully emphasised a personal motive behind Kristeva's reluctance to put forward a theory of homosexuality, pointing out that the analyst's use of countertransference is inseparable from the formulation of her theories. Countertransference could be described as the entanglement between psychoanalyst and patient histories. It refers to the analyst's unconscious response to aspects of the patient's narrative that remind her of her own history. In the quote above, Kristeva notes the love of the homosexual patient for the analyst because it echoes the analyst's own love for her 'subjugating mother'. Oliver reminds us that Kristeva's writings cannot be severed from her psychoanalytic practice, and that in using transference insight, she is being true to the Freudian tradition she has claimed as her framework. While we cannot ignore that Kristeva's writings are indeed informed by the (psycho-analytic) reflection of an intimacy of experience, I am nevertheless proposing to tease out a theory of woman's homosexuality from Kristeva's work and to show the original contribution she has made to an understanding of women's psychical life in general, and of women's homosexual desire in particular.

My main aim however will be to consider the view that Kristeva exhibits a homophobic bias in her work on women's sexuality. Given that Kristeva's uneasiness with homosexuals of both sexes is really an uneasiness with what she calls the 'subjugating mother', the term 'lesbophobic' would arguably be more appropriate. Nevertheless, I will stick with the term 'homophobia' for different reasons. First, as

the quote above suggests, even if the prime (unconscious) object of the phobia is indeed the mother, the secondary (conscious) object of her unease targets lesbians and gay men. Hence, we should talk of a more general homo-phobia (fear of the same) rather than lesbo-phobia. Furthermore, I aim to show that Kristeva's take on 'lesbianism' is at variance with the popular understanding of it. On the surface she appears to display a lesbophobic rhetoric, but a closer reading will challenge this and show that her take on lesbianism can be recast as an aesthetic challenge against hetero-sexual hegemony. This paper will thus seek to revisit Kristeva's work on women's sexualities and will emphasise the importance and subversive force she gives to homosexuality in her theory of subjectivity. I propose to show that Kristeva effectively critiques Freud's views on women's (hetero-) sexual identity, that she contributes her own theory on women's primary experience and that in doing so, she not only offers a theoretical piece that was missing in Freud's formulation, but also adds valuable knowledge to theories of women's homosexual desire. Throughout the piece, I will reserve the terms 'lesbian' and 'lesbianism' to indicate added political undertones, as in the expression 'lesbian and gay rights', and otherwise use the phrase 'woman's primary homosexuality'.

### **Female Homosexuality From Freud to Kristeva**

Julia Kristeva's intervention on the topic of female homosexuality can be divided into two distinct categories. On the one hand, Kristeva proposes a construction of 'lesbianism' as power play where 'the lesbian' is engaged in relationships of dominance more akin to what is commonly termed butch/femme identities. Her views cannot be dissociated from her own firsthand experience of feminist groups in the 1970s. In fact, Kristeva's sometimes bitter words regarding 'lesbians' are a direct consequence of her dealings with feminist groups, whom she perceived as oppressive. She says, 'I have many problems with the feminist movement because I am uncomfortable with all militant movements. [...] Let's just say that I found these groups often adhere to the very dogmas they opposed.' (1988 in Guberman, 1996: 7). She claims that a certain (separatist) type of Anglo-American feminism encourages would-be feminists to 'cling to differentialism and fan the flame of a war

between the sexes that is no doubt quite real.' (in Guberman, 1996: 269)<sup>1</sup>. She grew increasingly dubious about feminism's capacity to change relationships of power and turned to a more academic recasting of feminism where women's identities were increasingly anchored in psychoanalytic theory (she qualified as a psychoanalyst in 1979). A definition of woman's homosexuality thus became embedded, as it is in Freud and his followers, in the wider context of Kristeva's effort at mapping women's psychical development. But if Kristeva's use of the Freudian framework allowed her to construct female homosexuality as a pseudo-sexuality, one that mimics the master-slave exchanges already seen in hetero-sexuality, her departure from the Freudian model also gives way to a distinct contribution to a theory of homosexuality. This is what I would now like to turn to.

Kristeva is famous for moderating Freud's take on women's sexual identities. Freud initially proposed that women would find some fulfilment in following a certain biological destiny and becoming mothers (1924/1976). Effectively, maternity would be experienced as temporary reparation for oedipal castration. Castration in Freud points to the child's realisation of the incest taboo and the severing of the child from the mother whose exclusive interest they seek. The wish for incest is subsequently transformed into a fantasy of forbidden union with the mother. In the girl's case, there is a further dimension. Castration is also the moment the girl realises the very fantasy of incest (which the boy will retain) is itself vain since she was always already castrated (1924/1976: 321). Freud logically concludes in favour of the inherent bisexuality of the girl but denies its cultural validity: woman's homosexual behaviour equals the disavowal of her castration and the disavowal of castration would compromise a woman's intelligibility as a member of patriarchal organisation. But Freud rescues girls from the doom of biological reality by proposing maternity as that which can compensate the girl's want of more complete being (1915/1991: 83-85). In the negative of Oedipus, the girl quite 'naturally' turns her attention to her father who can fill the void left by her discovery of castration with a child. As the father is equally forbidden, she in turn displaces her want onto other men.

So, Freud proposes *one single psychosexual model* for both sexes. In his vision, Oedipus is the stepping stone towards the displacement of the love object, the boy from the mother onto other women, the girl from the mother to the father onto other men. This is where Kristeva recast the

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<sup>1</sup> Butler also accuses feminism of encouraging a victim-perpetrator dialectic that serves only one purpose: to give feminism's goal (saving women from oppression) force and coherence. See "'Women" as the Subject of Feminism' (Butler, 1990: 2-8).

oedipal model and rivalled Freud's take on castration. She will propose *two models* of psychosexual development. Her second model is founded not on the oedipal myth but on the myth of the Virgin Mary.

### **The 'Madonna Model' of Psychosexual Development**

In 'Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini' (1975a in Oliver 1997) and 'Stabat Mater' (1976 in Oliver 1997), Kristeva applied herself to analysing a specifically feminine modality of signification and rejected Freud and Lacan's premise of an irremediable repression of the feminine. If Freud's oedipal model is basically the promise made to 'man' of a possible reunion with the maternal via women other than his mother, Kristeva proposes the myth of the immaculate conception as the prototypical fantasy where 'woman'<sup>2</sup> fantasises 'her' reunion with the mother.

Kristeva does not dispute Freud's views. The realisation of her castration leads the girl to seek some form of phallic compensation and many women take advantage of the biological opportunity maternity offers. But she argues upon clinical observation that Freud was partly mistaken to believe that women agree to maternity as a consequence of castration. She notes that female patients consistently report their fascination for the myth of the Virgin Mary. Her analysis leads her to conclude that women engage in projects of maternity/motherhood, whether actual, imagined, or even figurative as we will see, to tell of a longing that strays from the strictly oedipal model proposed by Freud. '[M]otherhood seems to be impelled *also* by a non-symbolic, nonpaternal causality' (1975a in Oliver, 1997: 303) she says. Some women become fascinated by the myth of the Madonna and her promise of a lived parthenogenesis, through which they would express their fantasmatic desire of 'the reunion of a woman-mother with the body of *her* mother' (303).

The metaphoric significance of the figure of the Madonna is particularly interesting as it takes Kristeva's model away from Freud's biological model. The fantasy of immaculate conception becomes

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<sup>2</sup> In Kristeva's work, 'man' and 'woman' are not ontological categories with a fixed status but the outcome of processes where unconscious formations and socio-cultural constraints shape their meanings and use. I have suggested somewhere else that the Madonna model equally affects men. For examples of Madonnitic fantasies in men see my 'From Scopophilic Pleasure to the *Jouissance* of the Madonna'. I will briefly come back to this later.

woman's fantasy to counter oedipal castration and yet gain symbolic visibility. To a woman, the Madonna is a maternal model, a wholesome or 'filled' figure, not yet de-phallicised by castration<sup>3</sup>, nor re-phallicised by impregnation. Mary's qualities (Virginity and immaculate conception) guarantee that she remains untouched by the phallus at all levels of (hetero) sexuality. In other words, to invoke 'Madonnica' fantasies is to challenge heterosexual modalities: the incest taboo, the inevitability of sexual difference and by extension the compulsion to hetero-sexuality.

Kristeva's originality in magnifying Madonnica fantasies is not in noticing the inherent bisexuality of women (Freud had already suggested it) but in describing a narrative specific to the psychosexual development of homosexual (lesbian) desire. Her Madonna model becomes a kind of universal blueprint in its own right. Girls would follow a path specific to them because the fear of castration is not motivation enough for them to forsake the mother fully. If this is the case, one might then ask why women would indeed turn from the mother and choose men as their love object. In her *Hatred and Forgiveness*, Kristeva (2005/2011) gave an uncomfortable answer to this question. She confirms her views on the shortcomings of Freud's 'fear of castration' for the girl but suggests that the daughter is nevertheless threatened with some form of physical violence, should she choose not to comply with paternal law. As the threat of paternal retaliation cannot aim to castrate her physically, castration takes another form. Instead, the fear to be 'beaten up' by the father would be what motivates the daughter to relinquish the mother and switch for father-like love objects. Kristeva's take on this aspect of the Oedipus Complex would stand as justification for the girl 'choosing' heterosexuality. It appears at first read uncomfortably hetero-phobic since heterosexuality becomes the girl's response to paternal coercion. Sexual difference and social law would then be founded on a double coercion: the boy towards exogamy and the girl towards heterosexuality.

The fear to be 'beaten up', as motive for the girl's consent to switch love object, is somewhat at odds with other parts of Kristeva's work where she discusses the daughter's journey. *Powers of Horror* (1982) for example speaks of an omnipotent archaically experienced mother who becomes the target of violent feelings. On the one hand, the mother provokes huge disappointment and hatred, once the daughter comes to realise the cultural limitations attributed to her mother's sex. On the other hand,

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<sup>3</sup> Since neither the child (for Freud) nor the mother (for Lacan) have yet been subjected to castration, Mary is the quintessential phallic mother figure.

the daughter acknowledges that her mother's sex is also her own and becomes fearful that she may herself be lost to those limitations ( 1982: 33), unless she actively severs the maternal tie in favour of a father-daughter connection. The daughter thus publically announces her desire for the social contract by making of her mother an object of anti-social, phobic and abject proportions (*Powers of Horror*, 1982: 14, 56), and denying her attraction for her. Given the image Kristeva gives of the mother-daughter bond, we might then ponder on what grounds she could re-cast that bond as the origin of women's homosexual organisation. Simply because the daughter's sacrificial gesture would also sacrifice her. She thus has a very good motive to ensure a certain permeability (or imperfection) of her sacrificial gesture. The residue of desire left after sacrifice enables the daughter to maintain some form of primary attachment to her own sex. In reverse, primary homo-sexuality is also what makes her the subject of Oedipal incompleteness.

I do not have the space to discuss the reasons for Kristeva's later take on the girl's motivation for switching love objects here, but in the context of my enquiry into Kristeva's homophobic deportment, it is worth emphasising that in the girl's development, the taboo of incest is only secondary to the taboo of homo-sexuality, whereas it is the opposite for the boy. To put it bluntly, the boy must give up the mother because she is his mother but the girl must give her up because she is female. In both cases, the issue is the rejection of 'kin' but kin takes on a different meaning: kin as 'same' for the girl and kin as 'ancestry'<sup>4</sup> for the boy. But under Kristeva's pen, while heterosexuality and exogamy *are* norms of socialisation, they are by no means presented as ideals of sexuality. Her suggestion of a coercion of the girl towards heterosexuality (or of the boy towards exogamy) is neither anti- nor pro-heterosexuality/exogamy. Rather, Oedipus' violent repression becomes the starting point towards women's homosexual desire<sup>5</sup>. But that is not all.

Aside the corporeal experience of motherhood, the Madonna model also has metaphoric undertones the consequences of which Kristeva is keen to follow through. Strictly speaking, Madonnian fantasies evoke a theory of mothers' homosexuality, but they are also more innovatively the starting point

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<sup>4</sup> I am using 'ancestry' rather than 'blood ties' to remain close to the oedipal tale. Oedipus' incestuous relationship with Jocasta (the Queen of Thebes) is a consequence of his attempt to avoid incest with the woman he wrongly believes to be his birth mother (the Queen of Corinth). His sense of incest has therefore more to do with what he imagines is 'kin' than what it actually is.

<sup>5</sup> For Kristeva's work on incest see for example *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980/1982).

towards a theory of all (male and female) individuals' lesbian desire. How we slip from the one to the other I would now like to turn to.

### **Woman's Primary Homosexuality**

At a corporeal level, the Madonnian desire belongs to a tradition that would be primarily shared by parturient females. The *fact* of her castration leads the girl to create another incestuous fantasy, a fantasy in which her biology has become an asset. The daughter's desire for motherhood and its corporeal enactment echo other mothers' engagement with the same experience. Kristeva makes of motherhood the moment when several narratives converge. In being pregnant, the daughter recalls the repressed fantasy of union with her mother. While it is now the daughter who is with-child, Kristeva makes of the experience one of an-amnesia where being with-child is reversed into the fantasmatic reminiscence of being child-with-mother. The daughter is thus subjected as an adult to the corporeal knowledge that once belonged to her mother and is united to her through the experience. But it also recalls what was then her experience of pre-oedipality, what it was like to be the child with whom union was desired<sup>6</sup>. The merger of pre-oedipal experience with maternal experience is not restricted solely to the mother-daughter pair, but echoes further maternal experiences of mother-daughter unions: the desire of her mother, her grand-mother, her great-grand-mother, etc for their own mothers. The narrative of maternity is thus one that chronicles a mother-daughter desire that is both diachronic and synchronic.

At a fantasmatic level, Madonnian experience challenges the sense of biological reality. Kristeva does not restrict maternal experience strictly to parturient females. She also talks of another kind of maternal experience Kelly Oliver has described in her essay 'Julia Kristeva's Maternal Passions' (2010: 7): 'Kristeva suggests that the structure of motherhood, like the structure of writing, art and analysis, is not primarily about giving birth but about rebirth, and the cyclical time of flowering and dying off necessary for life.' The Madonna model I have described is but one configuration of the

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<sup>6</sup> We might wonder about the fantasy to be that union, in foetal experience. Kristeva begins her theory with birth and does not to my knowledge discuss what the phenomenology of foetal experience could be. She does not rule out the impact of earlier experience of splitting but birth remains the prototype towards psychosexual development.

structure of motherhood, one that describes a structure of being which, I am arguing is specific to lesbianism. It follows that like the structure of motherhood, the 'structure of lesbianism' is not primarily about biological categories but about the ontological structuring of biology. In this sense, it is not surprising that Kristeva should have, on occasion, attributed the term 'lesbian' to men to refer to a certain aesthetic conception of subjective encounters that I will call 'feminine-feminine': 'the artist paints a woman *as if* he was a woman loving her double. And let's add that there is a thousand ways to be a woman and to make the feminine visible.' (my emphasis)<sup>7</sup>. She is clearly suggesting the lesbian disposition of the male artist engaged with the representation of the feminine. Kristeva thus formulates a theory of the 'feminine-feminine' encounter by positing the universal capacity of individuals to adopt identities 'as-if' situated in the fantasmatic realm.

The question of identities 'as-if' requires some clarification. First, if the individual can adopt an identity 'as-if', this would suggest the existence of meaningful identities out of which the individual can pick and choose. This is obviously not what Kristeva is proposing, given her rejection of fixed ontological categories of identity. When she talks of identities 'as-if', she is referring to categories that are constituted by reference to categories that are imagined stable and real. But this creates another difficulty when it comes to considering the modalities of a 'feminine-feminine' encounter. Given Kristeva's positioning of the feminine as marginal to signification, the feminine-feminine would then be doubly incoherent. It is thus crucial to the intelligibility of women's sexualities to maintain the co-presence of two modalities of feminine pleasure, phallic and fantasmatic. To Kristeva, the co-presence of two structuring models is the condition that allows some leeway to accommodate all desires. As-if identities are then the way to make intelligible the modalities of feminine-feminine exchange. For example, she proposed in *Des Chinoises* (1974) different permutations of homosexual identity in which the sex of the sexual partners is less important than their psychosexual modelling: rejection of the male partner, feminisation of the male partner, or a female adopting a masculine or feminine stance with a female partner who deploys the same strategies (Kristeva, 1974: 33). Whatever the psychical modelling a woman chooses, the phallus remains the referent of lesbian sexuality. But we find already that unlike Freud, the presence of a penis is not a *sine qua non*

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<sup>7</sup> 'l'artiste peint la femme comme s'il était une femme aimant son double. Et ajoutons qu'il pourrait y avoir mille et une façons d'être femme et de rendre visible le féminin invisible.' (Kristeva, 2005: 172, my translation).



condition to female homo-sexuality. Rather, it is the idea of it, the presence of some psychical mechanism by which 'cutting' is present in the sexual exchange that marks sexualities. By the time Kristeva writes the third volume on feminine genius (2002) she routinely gives more weight to the individual's psychical 'profile' than to their biological sex. Psychical reality is the preferred site for aesthetic resistance and for the potential to change socio-political reality. Women's homosexuality is then positioned between two ends of a psychical spectrum: as we saw earlier, at one end is the Madonnian fantasy, doubling of bodies and search for female kinship that would repair the phallic injury of castration (2002: 351-2). On the other, is women's mimicry of men (2002: 354-5). Kristeva still sees the former as a feminine-feminine ideal, liveable at a fantasmatic level only, while the latter is a masquerade which, while being culturally coherent, is not radical enough, politically or aesthetically (I return to this in the next section). To sum up, women's homosexualities oscillate somewhere between the two ends of the spectrum and are indeed defined in relation to the phallus: its expurgation typifies the attempt to incarnate the feminine-feminine fantasy and constitute 'the delightful arena of a neutralised, filtered libido, devoid of the erotic cutting edge of masculine sexuality' (Kristeva, 1983/1987: 80-1); its unquestioned adoption leads to 'the havoc of the "master-slave" game' (1983/1987: 81).

### **Homophobia**

Unsurprisingly, Kristeva's work on female homosexuality was not received with open arms. Following the introduction of her 'Virgin Mary model' in the mid-seventies, early eighties, critical reception was divided. Some were seduced by the potential semiotic experience offers<sup>8</sup>, effectively anticipating Kristeva's next move with the promotion of an autonomous, 'maternocentric' category of being. They were disappointed when Kristeva herself objected to it<sup>9</sup>. Those who heard her objection, rejected or disregarded this new psychosexual model because semiotic experience was cast as a 'disposition' of the speaking subject with little cultural impact<sup>10</sup>, and because this maternal disposition requires mediation by the symbolic anyway. Hence, the semiotic seemed to offer no hope of emancipation for

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<sup>8</sup> Kelly Oliver (1993: 176 and 182-3) for example.

<sup>9</sup> *Tales of Love* (1987: 80-81).

<sup>10</sup> Janice Doane and Devon Hodges (1992: 76).

women. But if the prospect of finding a path towards women's emancipation looked bleak, it appeared even more doubtful in the case of her work on female homosexuality.

First, Kristeva assimilates 'lesbianism [...] to psychosis, an escapist flight from the symbolic and a regression beneath culture' (Fraser, 1989: 6). 'Being' a lesbian would amount to some kind of puerile running away from social responsibility that 'would lead to the psychotic unravelling of identity' (Butler, 1990: 117). Second, homophobia would be the consequence of Kristeva's attachment to a psychoanalytic (phallus-centred) framework that places the experience of men foremost and above any other. Nancy Fraser complained that 'Kristeva's homophobia is symptomatic of deep theoretical and political difficulties' (1989: 6), seconded by Ann Rosalind Jones who suggested that to accept Kristeva's definition of sexual identities, one should be 'willing to overlook its homophobia and its acceptance that culture is eternally male-centred' (1984: 69). The rejection of the Freudian/Lacanian model, and in particular the notion that meanings are exclusively the domain of the Symbolic, would render Kristeva's model of sexuality nonsensical. This led Judith Butler to cast 'Kristeva's lesbian' as a linguistic non entity: 'By projecting the lesbian as 'Other' to culture, and characterizing lesbian speech as the psychotic "whirl of words," Kristeva constructs lesbian sexuality as intrinsically unintelligible.' (Butler, 1990: 118). This brings us to a third concern with Kristeva's work. The relegation of women's homosexual identity to conceptual insignificance has consequences at a corporeal level as it translates into 'an immediate attenuation of the erotic force of lesbian desire' (Cairns, 2006: 64), effectively making of female homosexuality a lesser form of sexuality lacking credence.

In short, critics complain that Kristeva's attachment to a psycho-analytic structuring of women's homosexual desire is what condemns 'lesbians' to psychosis, incest and sexual inferiority. More damning still, Judith Butler<sup>11</sup> demonstrated that theorists like Kristeva have a hidden interest in using phallus-centred theoretical frameworks. These guarantee the maintenance of excluded categories (like psychosis, incest and sexual inferiority) as the condition to the existence of instituted ones (sanity, sexual lawfulness and sexual supremacy). In other words, Kristeva would, under the guise of subversive politics, maintain a status quo that guarantees heterosexual women a place on the correct side of paternal law. Hence, for Butler, psychosis, incest and sexual inferiority are 'homophobic

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<sup>11</sup> Judith Butler (1990/2008).

signifiers' (1990: 180) that both make lesbianism signify danger and warn women against the hazard of its practice.

These critics do have a point. Kristeva indeed associates female homosexuality with psychosis and incest, as I described earlier. But I will disagree that this is necessarily a negative thing, even within a phallus-centred framework. Kristeva's work on women's homosexuality is not so much founded on homophobic premises, than on strict phallocentrism. In the final section, I will aim to show that the inclusion of Kristeva's ethical framework (an aspect often pushed aside) allows a different reading of 'incest' and 'psychosis' and allows to recast Kristeva's 'homosexual' as a figure with politically subversive potential.

### **Woman's Primary Homosexuality and Lesbianism**

Many authors (like Butler, Jones, Fraser and Cairns) have criticised Kristeva for the way she stubbornly 'safeguards the notion of culture as a paternal structure' (Butler, 1990/2008: 109). Kristeva seems indeed to show little concern for the plight of lesbian activists, if we compare what she has said about lesbianism and her comments on other marginalised groups, foreigners in particular, whom she has vehemently defended against social exclusion. It seems to me that their concerns with homophobia are the result of theoretical de-contextualising, and that there is a real need to relocate Kristeva's critique of lesbianism in the psycho-analytic context it was created in. For this reason, Butler's excellent critique of Kristeva (1990/2008) is not entirely useful here. Butler famously accused Kristeva of assuming the existence of a historical developmental path of the individual: 'Kristeva posits a maternal body prior to discourse that exerts its own causal force in the structure of the drives' she says (Butler, 1990/2008: 125). She accuses Kristeva of re-enforcing paternal law with her theory of pre-paternal (or maternal/natural) causality: 'the discursive production of the maternal body as prediscursive is a tactic in the self-amplification and concealment of those specific power relations by which the trope of the maternal body is produced.' (Butler, 1990/2008: 125). She believes the formulation of different stages in individual development is the discursive effects of a narrative of self that is made intelligible through its historicisation. Butler addresses the same critique to *all* narratives that seek legitimacy through discursive endurance. This would include lesbian activism, which has

attached considerable importance to the historical rehabilitation and visibility of lesbians. I will then not take on board Butler's critique in this section as both Kristeva and lesbian activists share a similar sense of individual and community history. I will instead assume, as Kristeva does, the existence of prediscursive life out of which symbolic life emerges.

Kristeva's refusal to give symbolic weight to primary experience in its own right is the main reason to see homophobia in her work. Indeed, she never conceives of pre-paternal time as a moment from which we might derive some form of aesthetic coherence. But Kristeva's fascination for the subversive potential of primary experience, even if it is alongside symbolic life, cannot be ignored either. Since her burst on the intellectual scene in the 1970s, she has repeatedly called intellectuals to adopt a particular kind of work ethics. The same ethics applies to the theorising of 'lesbianism'.

'In the end, recognizing feminine "specificity" and "creativity" associates them with the structures and identities borrowed from paternalistic and monotheistic societies. Because such societies do not recognize feminine specificity, they try to put it aside, subdue it, and make sure no one talks about it.' (1975b, in Guberman, 1996: 106)

'Lesbian' specificity and creativity would be the specificity and creativity of feminine-feminine encounters. Such specificity/creativity is not ontologically coherent except by approximation with already existing structures of sexual categories, for example the recognition of butch/femme lesbianism approximates hetero-sexuality. Experiences that would be more authentically 'lesbian', feminine-feminine then, would be doubly unintelligible. '[C]ould one imagine an erotics of the purely feminine?' she asks in *Tales of Love* (1987: 80). At first, the answer appears to be uncompromisingly negative. 'To the extent that she has a loving soul, a woman is drawn into the same dialectic involving confrontation with the Phallus [...]. Whatever the organ, confrontation with power remains.' (80-81)

The demands of LGBT groups for the validation of lesbian communities and lifestyles are therefore impossible in Kristeva's vision of a purely feminine-feminine form of 'lesbianism'. The type of lesbianism that is recognised by equal opportunity laws is not that of the feminine-feminine encounter. Rather equal opportunity policies are negotiated on the ground of their resembling (their being 'subdued to', Kristeva would say) pre-existing heterosexual categories. Anything specifically 'lesbian' falls outside the remit of what she terms paternalistic/monotheistic or phallic recognition. Kristeva's take on 'lesbianism' then is that of an impossible ideal of woman's sexuality.

Kristeva's refusal to budge can easily be constructed as a refusal to compromise the radicalism of her vision of 'woman's primary homosexuality'. In a recent intervention on 'The Role of the Intellectual Today' (2007), she intimated that the intellectual has a duty to see through 'the actualization of intelligence' (220). 'The thinking subject should connect his thought to his being in the world through an affective 'transference' that is also political and ethical' (220). The extraction of affective transference and its inclusion in symbolic thought is where she locates radicalism (1984). Kristeva's work ethics thus manifests itself as resistance to intellectual complacency and commitment to the radical overhaul of thought. By the same token, she is committed to opposing what hinders radical thinking. In her work, transference remains a constant area of interest for a radical ethics of thought, but the form of what obstructs its good functioning changes with socio-historical circumstances. In 2007, Kristeva saw something she calls 'the malady of ideality' (224) as the source of intellectual complacency. 'Modern society, which is entirely incapable of understanding the structuring need of ideality, combines its destruction of the family fabric and weakening of authority with a failure to deal innovatively with adolescence' (224). We must recall that in Kristeva's work, adolescence often refers to an age group but more frequently to the psychical state of the individual caught in ethical and moral dilemmas. Adolescence points to an open structure where meanings are being contested and opposed to the adult state where they are fixed. In other words, Kristeva is suggesting that presented with new demands for how one should be in the world, modern society fails to provide models creative enough to accommodate these new demands and falls back instead on 'normative conscience' (226) in the (vain) hope of pacifying agitators. The job of the intellectual is not to concur with the normative discourse but 'to come up with ideals adapted to modern times and the multiculturalism of souls.' (225).

To suggest that Kristeva ignores the importance of lesbianism in women's outlaw narratives is to ignore the omnipresence of women's homosexual desire in her work, especially her psychoanalytic practice. As she says:

'[W]hat interests me when I listen to someone in the psychoanalytic session is not to know that Jean is homosexual and Marie is not, but what kind of particular homosexuality he is living, not to put an etiquette on it, homosexual or heterosexual. Because there are sometimes more resemblances between one homosexual and one heterosexual than the people considered to belong to the same group.' (in Oliver 1997: 337).

The refusal to categorise sexualities along biological lines is not new in Kristeva's work. But applied to a theory of female homosexuality, it is the starting point towards a different theory and aesthetic of lesbianism, including the political implications such an aesthetic entails. In psychoanalysis, Oedipus is *the* motive in selecting sexual partners with particular gender attributes. Some have argued that the psychoanalytic model is heterosexual and cannot accommodate other forms of sexuality but by casting them as deviant from heterosexuality. Yet, Kristeva re-iterates through the *same* Freudian framework a theory of sexual development whereby all women, including herself, engage in some form of lesbian experience, whether they know it consciously or not. To be clear, the *same* phallus-centred framework allows not for one single sexuality (that of heterosexual men) but for two *modalities* of sexual expression from which men and women derive a multiplicity of sexualities. The co-habitation of different sexualities in *every* individual is more loyal to Kristeva's own theory of subjectivity, than suggestions that she denies women homosexual viability. Effectively, women are faced with a spectrum, from semiotic disposition to symbolic identification, via more archaic forms of primary identifications. The choice of identification is not solely a question of how psychotic or how intelligible a woman wishes herself to be, but rather it is about how she handles the co-presence of different modalities of being, some intelligible, some incoherent. In Kristeva's work, incoherence (contingent to the semiotic, psychosis, primary experience, etc) is always associated with subversive potential. Let us be clear and insist on this: psychosis, incestuous desire or immaturity, the same attributes we defined earlier as signifiers of Kristeva's homophobic premises, are for her the primary material from which comes aesthetic and political change. But this potential can only be fulfilled on the condition that it is supported secondarily by some form of symbolic moulding.

I would thus conclude that Kristeva's off-handedness with critics requesting she clarifies her take on lesbianism has more to do with her critique of lesbian models lacking creativity, rather than a desire to keep ranks with the (heterosexual) establishment. In her eyes, lesbian activists subordinate their lifestyles to established relational categories and wrongly believe they gain alternative status when they are granted new rights like jointly declaring tax, 'marrying' through civil partnerships or co-parenting children. In other words, she deplores a lack of self-reflection which prevents 'lesbians' to critique their own demands and the formulation of more creative ones. What are we to make of such an idealistic (and unrealistic) position?

Her refusal to endorse LGBT demands are unsurprising in the light of her intellectual commitment. Granting lesbians the same rights as heterosexual women and men is not a guarantee of liberation, but rather a sign of alignment, of homogenisation of women's sexualities. In brief, it misses the point. I am not suggesting Kristeva should now be made into a champion of lesbian liberation. In the same way that she acknowledged the importance of reaching short term symbolic goals for feminism (suffrage, the right to education for example) in spite of her reservations regarding feminists, it is surprising that she has not equally done or said enough to defend the importance of short term achievement for lesbian activists, even if their doing so reinforces the current sexual framework. As she herself once said, '[o]ne does not deconstruct before having constructed' (1989-90 in Guberman, 1996: 56), and while 'lesbian' and 'woman' are equally on the side of non representation, they nevertheless need some form of symbolic visibility. However, inasmuch as Kristeva's ethical boundaries privilege academic exercise over socio-political concerns, her attachment to a certain conception of lesbianism cannot be described as homophobic. On the contrary, I hope to have shown that it merits attention for the critical tools it provides us in the critique of hegemonic sexualities.

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