Desire

In the official discourse of sexuality which psychoanalysis has become today, desire is the “instinct” that makes a person, any person, desire heterosexual intercourse as the only sexual fulfillment and the only manifestation of one’s subjectivity. The imaginary, dreams, desire, will, any concept related to subjectivity passes through this sieve and does not survive it. Heterosexualized, these concepts serve as vehicles of oppression.

As lesbians we can well ask heterosexual society: what have you done with our desire? A desire for the penis? A desire for children? A caricature. Something that is the opposite of pleasure—total boredom. What do you want to do with our desire? Make it fit in? Lobotomies, forced therapy. Force it to practice heterosexuality. Obligatory intercourse. Obligatory reproduction. If desire could liberate itself, it would have nothing to do with the preliminary marking by sexes.

Heterosexuality is the desire for one’s own sex. But it is also the desire for something else that is not connoted. This desire is resistance to the norm.

Heterosexuality

The concept of heterosexuality was created in the French language in 1911. It corresponds to an effort at normalizing the dominant sexuality undertaken particularly by psychoanalysis, despite its pretensions to being a revolutionary science. This concept is a rationalization which consists in presenting as a biological, physical, instinctual fact, inherent to human nature, the seizure by men of women’s reproduction and of their physical persons (the exchange of women and goods). Heterosexuality makes the difference of the sexes not a cultural difference but a natural difference. Heterosexuality admits as normal only
that sexuality which has a reproductive purpose. Everything else is perversion (see in Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* at what moment a kiss becomes a perversion—when it strays from and no longer fulfills its function as a preliminary to intercourse. See in the same book all the argument concerning the “stages” of woman’s sexuality through which Freud intends to make women pass by force so that they may fulfill their reproductive “destiny.” See particularly the myth of the vaginal orgasm denounced a few years ago by Ann Koedt.).

**Lesbianism**

The most formal manifestation of lesbian culture took place in the sixth century B.C. in Lesbos, whence its name. It is difficult to know if this manifestation was created in resistance to the patriarchy, or if it always existed as such. What remains of Sappho’s texts and the titles of lost texts by other poetesses of Lesbos give no evidence that this culture developed against the other, but rather outside of it, coexisting with it. To the extent that its origin is to be found outside the patriarchy, one could call it an a-patriarchal, a-heterosexual culture. I know that it is extremely foolhardy to play with hypotheses concerning so distant an epoch. Nevertheless, if one analyzes the art of Crete of the same period, there is every reason to believe that the patriarchy in these regions was not necessarily universal (cf. the frescoes of Knossos showing acrobats playing with bulls). What is certain is that the amazons fought the nascent patriarchy. Was it in homage to them that Damophyla, poetess of Lesbos, wrote her *Hymn to Artemis*? We will never know, since this epic was burned in Alexandria at the same time as the poems of Sappho. But there can be no doubt that war was waged against lesbianism. The systematic destruction of texts born from that culture, the clandestinity into which it has since been plunged bear witness to this fact. One has to recognize that lesbianism must have represented a grave menace to justify such a persecution, indeed a total obliteration, the most spectacular that has been carried out in history, together with that of the amazons. As early as the period of the Roman Empire, Ovid brought Sappho into line by making her the heroine of a heterosexual romance. There has been no worse betrayal than to assimilate, to adapt Sapphism to what was totally alien to it. What was the real menace represented by the Lesbians? They were a living proof that women are not born as the natural servants of men. What’s more, they demonstrated that nonheterosexual societies are conceivable, that there is no norm for the constitution of a society. It is only logical that homosexual women look to Lesbos as the unique model of a culture of undominated women, a culture outside the heterosexual social field, where individuals practiced a subjectivity in no way marked by women’s supposedly distinctive reproductive function. Pleasure for pleasure’s sake, as Baudelaire, the lesbian poet, noted, characterizes this subjectivity/sexuality. Lesbianism is much more than homosexuality (the concept homologous to heterosexuality). Lesbianism is much more than sexuality. Lesbianism opens onto another dimension of the human (insofar as its definition is not based on the “difference” of the sexes). Today lesbians are discovering this dimension outside what is masculine and feminine.

**Lesbians**

As lesbians we are the product of a clandestine culture that has always existed in history. Until the last century Sappho was the only writer of our literature who was not clandestine. Today lesbian culture is still partially clandestine, partially open, in any case “marginal” and completely unknown to the culture. It is, nevertheless, an international culture with its own literature, its own painting, music, codes of language, codes of social relations, codes of dress, its own mode of work. Just as they are unlimited by national frontiers (the lesbian nation is everywhere), so lesbians come from all social categories. Outside the context of the feminist struggle, they already constitute a ‘criminal’ subgroup or class. These individuals insist on living outside the ‘law’ of their class system,” as Ti-Grace Atkinson wrote in *Amazon Odyssey*. Within the context of the feminist movement they have developed their international connections. They are there, present in the social field during the “fallow” periods of the feminist movement, because the development of their culture and the very fact of their physical existence are irreversible. Politically,
feminism, as a theoretical and practical phenomenon, encompasses lesbianism and at the same time is surpassed by it. Without feminism, lesbianism as a political phenomenon would not have existed. Lesbian culture and lesbian society would still be as secret as they have always been. On the level of theory lesbianism and feminism articulate their positions in such a way that one always questions the other. Feminism reminds lesbianism that it must reckon with its inclusion in the class of women. Lesbianism warns feminism against its tendency to treat as immutable and determining essences what are simple physical categories. Let’s stop there in order to avoid overly broad generalizations, and let’s content ourselves with this minimal basis: Lesbianism is the culture through which we can politically question heterosexual society on its sexual categories, on the meaning of its institutions of domination in general, and in particular on the meaning of that institution of personal dependence, marriage, imposed on women.

Sexuality

The emergence of women’s movements and homosexual movements and their struggles have brought sexuality into the political field. Just like women’s movements, homosexual movements demand the right to dispose freely of the body (of the physical person appropriated by the political institutions of heterosexual societies: you will be a mother, you will be a father). This explains why the men of the Front homosexuel d’action révolutionnaire shouted in the streets together with the women of the Mouvement de libération des femmes, “we all had abortions.” The homosexuals who fight consider themselves to be resisting the norm. For us sexuality has only a distant relation with heterosexuality, since the latter is dominated by its final cause, reproduction, and since the obligatory exercise of heterosexuality, far from having as its goal the sexual expansion of individuals, assures an absolute control of their physical persons. Homosexuals have in common with women the fact of being only “sex.” Homosexuals and women have been dismissed from humanity.

Nevertheless, if the exercise of sexuality means for society heterosexual intercourse, we are far from sexuality. We are equally far from understanding that famous idea of sexual difference on which our oppression is founded. For us there are, it seems, not one or two sexes but many (cf. Guattari/Deleuze), as many sexes as there are individuals. Even though they have enclosed us in a sexual ghetto, we do not accord to sexuality the same importance as heterosexuals. Sexuality is for us an inevitable battleground insofar as we want to get outside of genitality and of the sexual economy imposed on us by the dominant heterosexuality. Since sexuality has for us no finality apart from its own exercise, it must be above all an exercise of subjectivity that involves the search for pleasure and the creation of a unique being, irreplaceable, self-sufficient, whom no heterosexual reduction would be able to account for. All reflection on sexuality is new and in its historical context marked through and through by class oppositions (men/women). Such reflection develops these oppositions only to normalize them, to transform them into universals, thus producing a reduction of the entire field of knowledge. The official discourse on sexuality is today only the discourse of psychoanalysis that builds on the a priori and idealist concept of sexual difference, a concept that historically participates in the general discourse of domination.

Snobbery

Not so long ago any form of sexuality not belonging to the norm was called decadent, and consequently all forms of resistance to heterosexual society were supposed to prove the decadence of the system (weakening of “virility,” that is, of the domination of women by heterosexual men). In the late Roman Empire the rise of feminist movements and the coming-out of lesbianism were supposed to have precipitated the fall of the empire by weakening the resistance (virile) to the barbarian invasions. That’s the language of open reaction. There is another and more pernicious form of reaction to lesbianism, the one which consists in denigrating it and treating it as snobbery. It’s in to be a lesbian, it seems; it’s fashionable, it’s snobbish. Colette already said it. One finds this same method of denigration in a May 1977 article in the San Francisco Chronicle. There would
seem to be among feminists a “fashion” that consists in having at least one lesbian “experience” in order to be “liberated.” And the author of the article calls that snobbery. Obviously, no one would think of saying that a male homosexual is a homosexual out of snobbery. On the contrary, the homosexuality of men is quite often considered with the greatest respect. Eternal and powerful Sodom, said Colette. That’s because the fascination that masters exercise on masters is justified and even logical, for how a master can be fascinated by, and desire a slave is not very clear. And, in fact, if one judges by the expressions of “desire” that men use toward women (rape, pornography, murder, violence, and systematic humiliation), there is no desire there but rather an exercise in domination. So, if there is nothing less evident from the point of view of desire than the desire of a man for a woman, the desire of a man for another man needs no justification. On the contrary, from the heterosexual point of view it is completely incomprehensible that one woman (dominated creature) should desire another woman (dominated creature). Also, if in spite of the minimal interest that is offered to one woman by the companionship, desire, and attraction of another woman (how could she do without masters, the only ones capable of giving her a being?), if in spite of everything that woman is a lesbian, it’s because she’s trying to make herself interesting, to shock, to scandalize even. But certainly not because she wants to give herself pleasure. She’s a snob, that’s all. The best weapons of heterosexuality: denial of the phenomenon, recuperation (it’s erotic for men to see two women together—harem lesbianism), ridicule.

**Woman**

Woman, female, are terms that indicate semantically that half the human population has been dismissed from humanity. Woman/slave, woman/dominated creature, woman/reproducer by obligation (woman/mother), “woman” like “slave” is a word, an irretrievable concept. The reality “woman” must disappear just as the reality “slave” after the abolition of slavery, just as the reality “proletarian” after the abolition of classes and of forced labor.

Insofar as the virtuality “woman” becomes reality for an individual only in relation to an individual of the opposing class—men—and particularly through marriage, lesbians, because they are not “women.” Besides, it is not as do not enter this category, are not “women.” (They are, of course, not “men” either.) And it is not “women.” (They are, of course, not “men” either.) And it is not “women” (victims of heterosexuality) that lesbians love and desire but lesbians (individuals who are not the females of men). And it is a fantastic “misunderstanding,” (related to political dishonesty) that consists in reproaching them for “refusing their femininity”—just as one reproaches feminists who, as everyone knows, think only of taking the place of men.

The designation “woman” will disappear no doubt just as the designation “man” with the oppression/exploitation of women as a class by men as a class. Humankind must find another name for itself and another system of grammar that will do away with genders, the linguistic indicator of political oppositions.

*Translated by George Stambolian*