

The Epicenity of the Text: LACANIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS

In previous issues, Borderlines has published several pieces, notably that by Brenda Longfellow in #6, which assume the importance of the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, for the feminist project. In this issue we present an article by Québécois psychoanalyst Charles Levin which expands on the difficulties inherent in this appropriation both in the nature of Lacan's own work and in the manner of its incorporation into the feminist discourse, particularly in the work of Jane Gallop and Jacqueline Rose. Notably, Levin emphasises the centrality of the phallus as the principle of signification in Lacan's work and, by extension, as the "essence of textuality as an epistemology." Thus the Lacanian feminist "is left with the dismal prospect of endlessly displacing the general significance of signification itself, and thus repeating the whole problematic of the Lacanian text." Levin's challenge to French derived feminist theory is the first of a series of theoretical essays that Borderlines will publish on current debates in cultural theory.

Ioan Davies



"In epicene language, as distinct from language imagined as either neutral or androgynous, gender is variable at will, a mere metaphor (Jacobus, p. 49)."

"The author of any critique is himself framed by his own frame of the other....(Johnson, pp. 167, 165)."

The letter as a signifier is thus not a thing or the absence of a thing, nor a word or the absence of a word, nor an organ or the absence of an organ, but a knot in a structure where word, things, and organs can neither be definably separated nor compatibly combined...



Freud and Lacan: the Psychopolitics of Totemism¹

In circles of social, cultural, literary, and film study -- and among some feminists -- Jacques Lacan has become something of an institution. He is commonly read in isolation from other psychoanalytic writers (Melanie Klein, Hanna Segal, Marion Milner, Edith Jacobson, Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, to name only a few possibilities, apart from Freud himself, and his immediate circle). Even the best known of Lacan's contemporaries are rarely cited in the arts and social science literature, with the exception of Klein and D.W. Winnicott, who are mentioned very sparingly indeed. On the other hand, Lacan is taken seriously by nearly everyone doing up-to-date cultural or feminist research. And of course he is frequently cited on such matters as metaphor and metonymy, and on the relation of the tropes to the dreamwork. Nobody refers to Ella Sharpe (pp. 9-10, 19-39), who developed this connection in the nineteen thirties.

The reasons for this condensation of psychoanalytic thought into the lone figure of Lacan are no doubt obscure, but they may have to do with the logic of identification. In order for Lacan to embody psychoanalysis, psychoanalysis first has to be reduced to the body of Freud himself. Then, on the basis of a fantasy about the betrayal of this body, Lacan can attempt to re-embody true psychoanalysis (the "return to Freud") in "the name of the father." Thus Lacan appears well situated both to share and to resolve the feelings of ambivalence which anyone approaching psychoanalysis is likely to feel.



Nearing psychoanalysis, especially in the atmosphere of a totemic fantasy such as this, it is easy to feel as if one is entering an already controlled space -- specifically, the authoritarian father's space. Moreover, as Lacan was to point out, the dead father is rather difficult to dislodge from his privileged position in the carefully self-cancelling structure of an obsessional discourse. The deliberate patterns of displacement and deferral in Lacan's *Ecrits* and seminars provide a seductive occasion for the deflection and management of (Oedipal) ambivalence and conflict.

As Jane Gallop suggests in *The Daughter's Seduction* (pp. 33-36), Lacan's appeal to feminists may be related to the way in which he set himself up as "the cock of the walk," a kind of contemporary ally and lover who provides magical access to the feared and admired oppressor to be overthrown. Lacan not only disposes of the master, but resurrects him as well: he is both a rebel and a redeemer, committing and then expiating the crime of desiring to partake in a fantasied omnipotence, such as that so commonly ascribed to Freud himself, and so universally resented in him. Lacan serves, in other words, as a conduit for projective identification onto the father.

The myth of Freud as primitive father is of course fundamental to psychoanalytic politics. If psychoanalysis is the dead body of Freud, then the rituals over his remains -- the vigil against grave robbers, the appropriation and resurrection of the corpus as the body of the analyst himself, sitting at the right hand of Freud -- are as characteristic of Lacanian practice as they are of members of the International. Lacan, however, is neither father, nor son, nor brother, but a kind of trinitarian demiurge -- like Thoth, a doyen of writing, a "god of resurrection... interested...in death as a repetition of life and life as a rehearsal of death...."



FEMINIST METATHEORY

Charles Levin

Thoth repeats everything in the addition of the supplement: in adding to and doubling as the sun, he is other than the sun and the same as it; other than the good and same, etc. Always taking a place not his own, a place one could call that of the dead or the dummy, he has neither a proper place nor a proper name. His propriety or property is impropriety or inappropriateness, the floating indeterminateness that allows for substitution and play (Derrida, 1981, p. 93)."

Unfortunately, this resolution of the problem of Freud's space (his resting place) runs into its own complications, which emerge most clearly in neostructuralist developments of Lacan's thought. Deconstructionist symbolics are immersed in rivalry with the parents, obsessed with creation as a process of dismemberment and annihilation. The theory and practice of textuality have become a sort of allegory about what is stolen from the paradoxical father (the supplement, or name without referent or substance) and from the irretrievable mother (the virgin-hymen-origin, or substance and referent without name). This cosmogony is not exclusively Oedipal: it also draws upon the *Orestia*. In the Lacanian version of that less celebrated tragedy, however, revenge against the mother never seems to be followed by reconciliation with her law, and the taming of Eumenides (primitive superego). The Lacanian father may be an oppressor, but he remains the only source of order, while the mother becomes, in a sense, much more dangerous: she is the betrayer, and this appears to be a feature of Lacan's thinking which persists, not only in the writings of Kristeva (1983, pp. 42-4; Gallop, 1982, pp. 117-8), but even in the anti-patriarchal discourse of Luce Irigaray, as Gallop (pp. 113-5) suggests.

Philippe Sollers is reported to have said that Lacan's political problems arose because he had "run afoul" of the

psychoanalytic "matriarchy" (Schneiderman, p. 13). Princess Bonaparte (who ransomed Freud after the *Anschluss*) was not the only daughter (or imaginary wife) of Freud whose authority Lacan disputed. There was also Melanie Klein and Anna Freud herself, who between them presided over English-speaking psychoanalysis for nearly half a century. Implicit in Lacan's denunciation of "ego psychology," and his return to Freud, was the fantasy of a march against domestication, the feminization of psychoanalytic theory. The publication of *Anti-Oedipus* during the heyday of Lacan's notoriety was a development of this, with its virile imagery of the social process, and its picture of Lacan himself as a family-oriented counter-insurgent who emasculated desire by theorizing it as a lack (Deleuze, 1972).

In general, the fact that Freud had a mother gets little play in the Lacanian imagination. But Freud actually seems to have had a privileged relationship with his mother. She had heard a prophecy that he would be a "great man," and told him about it. In some ways, Freud's feeling about his own creation, psychoanalysis, was like his mother's attitude toward him: he thought he had brought something significant into the world. A question -- or a fantasy -- arising out of this is the following: what if reading Freud were a gratification, rather than a mere competition for old space? What if Freud were not only the stern and prohibitive professor-superego, but also a kind of mother, or even what Melanie Klein called the "good breast?" And what if the "conquering hero" of which Jones speaks in his biography of Freud were really psychoanalysis itself (as an opening, as something to be pursued, an adventure), and not Freud the man, or any other man or woman? Perhaps through his text, Freud was also able to say: "This is my space, which I want to share with you; but the world is out there, still to be discovered!" That is a symbolic relation to psychoanalysis very different from Lacan's, though it is not unlike the transference which Gallop managed to develop onto the work that Lacan left behind, in her *Reading Lacan*.

Some Lacanian Themes

An interesting example of Lacan's status in contemporary discourse on culture can be found in Jacqueline Rose's excellent introduction to the volume of essays on *Feminine Sexuality* by Lacan and his circle (Mitchell & Rose, 1982). What is so typical of this essay is not the handling of theoretical issues (which

Rose does very well), but the mythogenic rhetoric in which the exposition of Lacan's "re-opening of the debate on feminine sexuality" is couched. Rose rejects the arguments of those, like Jones, Horney, or Klein, who dissented, in one way or another, from Freud's various hypotheses on gender. Yet, in describing Lacan's insight into sexual politics, she only reiterates the original line of reasoning used against Freud's claim that the analysis of the "physical consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes" leads to a kind of biological "bedrock" (Freud, 1937, p. 252). Rose insists that it is to Lacan alone (and his discovery of the signifier) that we owe the possibility of a genuine critique of phallogocentrism: according to her, Lacan revealed that the indexation of sexual difference on possession or absence of the phallus "covers over the complexity of the child's early sexual life with a crude opposition in which that very complexity is refused or repressed (p. 42)." But nowhere in Lacan is there a discussion of this 'complexity,' or of early sexual life in general, apart from the child's relation to the phallus. One has to turn to writers like Klein or Robert Stoller or Masud Khan if one wants to read about the subtleties of 'pre-Oedipal' sexuality.

The essence of Rose's historical account of the sexuality/gender debate within psychoanalysis lies in the claim that, with the exception of Lacan, psychoanalysts (and psychoanalytically inspired commentators) have "failed to see that the concept of the phallus in Freud's account of human sexuality was part of his awareness of the problematic, if not impossible, nature of sexual identity itself (p. 28)." This is a very broad and somewhat misleading statement which gets its force from two general features of Lacanian theory.

The first is a question of emphasis: it is probably true that the phallus plays a more fundamental and determinant role in Lacanian theory than in any other school of psychoanalysis. The second factor is that Lacan grants the phallus an objective status unusual in post-Freudian theory: it becomes a 'symbolic' universal in the classical sense, acting independently of the body's history and of its associations.

Lacan's recognition of the problematic role of the phallus is perhaps not so unique as Rose makes out. In work which preceded his, Melanie Klein paid a great deal of attention to unconscious processes involving a kind of archetypal phallus like Lacan's. Indeed one might say that the 'thrust' of Klein's exploration of pregenital psychology

was her insistence that the fantasy of the phallus (and its structural correlate, the superego) is not delayed until the onset of the classical Oedipal situation, as Sigmund and Anna Freud had maintained (Klein, pp. 135-6).

In fact there are striking parallels between Klein's early conception of infantile psychodynamics and Lacan's emphasis on the child's identification with the object of the mother's desire (again, the phallus). However, Lacan's view is based on the idea of a quasi-naturalistic symbiosis between the mother and child -- the classical conception of primary narcissism. The infant lives passively in an objectless state of psychic oblivion whose accomplice, for Lacan, is the mother's invidious desire. According to Lacan, this is a trap from which only the accomplice, for Lacan, is the mother's invidious desire. According to Lacan, this is a trap from which only the symbolic function of the father can save the child, by separating the phallus from the self (castration), and placing it in the objective external order of language, so that the child can be apprised of its own "lack" (e.g., Lemaire, p. 92; Kristeva).

Whereas the Lacanian solution to the psychology of infantile dependency thus appears to be an intensification and objectification of the function of the phallus -- a raising of its status within discourse -- Klein's thinking moves in the opposite direction. Klein stresses the infant's *active* experience of its own desire in aggressive relation to the Other. If the phallus is a term, at the adultomorphic level of language and society, for one of the more primitive conceptions of power, then for Klein the infant does not *identify* with the 'phallus' in the simple classical sense, but actively appropriates it (as an elaboration of the breast and other experiences), in cycles of incorporation and projective identification. In brief, the problem for Klein's infant -- or the 'psychotic' child within us -- is not how to *accept* the allegedly independent role of the phallus in the symbolic order, but how to demystify it. This involves coming to terms with unconscious fantasies of power (which eventually have become displaced onto a general sign system playing on presence/absence of the penis). The power fantasies (having to do mainly with omnipotence and retribution), inevitably conceal more profound feelings of envy and guilt which interfere with the infant's capacity to explore, elaborate, and internalize dimensions of pleasurable experience or trust in mutuality (the 'good breast'). Thus, while Klein's work is full of difficulties and by no means suggests that the political problem of 'phallogocentrism' is simpler or less severe than Rose maintains, Klein at least refrains from arguing that the structure of signification as such is grounded in the phallus, or that meaning derives from the body part the mother doesn't have (as opposed to the ones she does, which are of greater interest to the infant anyway).²

The justification of Rose's wholesale rejection of all but Lacanian developments of psychoanalysis lies in her contention that Lacan alone recognized that the unconscious "constantly undermines" the sexual subject. Stated in this general way, however, it is difficult to see how a Freudian grasp of the "link between sexuality and the unconscious" can be denied to everyone but Lacan. What is in fact specific to Lacan is a claim about the *structure* of the unconscious -- namely, that it is segmented, like a written language, or any other system of inscription, and that it functions according to the laws of association and contiguity. Lacan expanded this claim by suggesting that language and the unconscious -- and by extension, sexuality -- are homologously structured through their common link to an essential process of substitution, or what he often describes, in allusion to a number of competing linguistic models, as 'metonymy.' Substitutability is, of course, a basic property of any unit defined within a digitally constructed system of signification. If the unconscious could be defined as such a system, governed by mechanisms of displacement, then psychoanalysis would be a mathesis, whose subject would be exhaustively describable in terms of linguistic "laws" or geometric and algorithmic graphs.³ But whenever Lacan specifies the linguistic structures of desire, he merely invokes a semiotic reformulation of the functions of the dreamwork and the structure of compromise formation in symptoms; or adumbrates a discourse model of some feature of superego conflict, like obsessional oscillations and manic flights.

Rose by no means accepts the positivistic interpretation of Lacan's work. But she does adopt its corollary, which is that subjective experience (including the emotional experience of material object relations) is epiphenomenal, and not the proper object of psychoanalytic work. Neither Rose nor Lacan have much to say about signification, which are arranged in systems and patterns either controlling or undermining the illusion of subjectivity. The Lacanian Symbolic is an impersonal structural causality (e.g., Althusser, p. 216; Lacan, 1964, pp. 20-1), which acts externally like a social force. The subject is only decentered in the sense that desire itself cannot really be experienced, except in terms of its effects, which are always organized into orders of signifiers. In this objectivistic conception of the substitution process, therefore, the basic psychoanalytic principle of the decentering of the subject is disconnected from the existential experience of indeterminacy and complexity inherent in subjectivity, and related instead to a quasi-sociological reduction: the subject is decentered for Lacan because it is determined -- because, in other words, it will be fixed in advance. The irony of this is consequently that whenever Lacanian thought attempts to demonstrate the "arbitrariness" of sexual identity, it in practice reinforces an underlying argument for its necessity, by removing the sources of sexual structuration to an ideal region outside

the history of bodily experience as psychoanalysis has been able to understand it.



Theoretical Problems

The implications of Rose's sociolinguistic approach to the unconscious emerge clearly from her exclusion of alternative perspectives on the mirroring relationships of early infancy. In a passing dismissal of Winnicott's work, for example, Rose states: "The mother does not mirror the child to itself... she grants an image to the child, which her presence instantly deflects (p. 30)." Rose's point here is essentially an epistemological (or deconstructive) one, namely, that the subject has no originary identity, that the baby doesn't have an 'itself' to be mirrored back to itself by the mother. But this sophisticated (essentially positivistic) vigilance against every hint of essentialism or misplaced concreteness conceals the inability of the Lacanian paradigm to grasp the problem of the infantile subject's (relationship to its own) feelings, and the vicissitudes of the infant's capacity for experience in relation to other bodily subjects. In other words, Rose emulates Lacan's tendency to replace the specificity of individual differences with the generality of a schematism.

Infants have very complicated feelings (ways of experiencing physical needs and sensations, as well as desires and emotions, some of which are observably violent). They also *elicit* an environment -- they are not restricted to the pure reactivity of behavioural psychology and the theory of primary narcissism.⁴ All of these qualities of the small child's subjectivity can be intuited, recognized, respected, and accepted by the child's subjects -- or at the other extreme, they can be ignored, denied, or utterly disqualified. Of course, the infant will always have to learn to take others into account more than he or she may wish to -- Freud's reality principle, like Lacan's Symbolic Order, says essentially this. But when the infant's expressivity is systematically disqualified -- or in other words, when the caretaker(s) can only "grant an image to the child" (as Rose would have it), while being unable "mirror the child back to itself," the survival of the child will come to depend on an inordinate degree of self-repression and reactivity. The schizoid sense of the unreality of one's own being that develops out of this passive survival strategy of the ego is not due solely to the assumption of an illusory or Imaginary identity in a universal "mirror stage," as Rose, following Lacan, maintains, but also to a particular and local disregard for the infant's difference. Whether or not the 'lack' to which Lacan refers is, in the last analysis, an ontological condition, it may also spring from a failure to acknowledge the child as an independent being in its relation with others. The desire for some kind of recognition, by another, of one's distinctness, has nothing to do with the "ideology of the

**The Lacanian father
 may be an
 oppressor, but he
 remains the only
 source of order, while
 the mother
 becomes...much
 more dangerous: she
 is the betrayer.**

unitary subject," or with the Western politico-juridical concept of the individual. So while Rose's views are certainly compelling, so are Winnicott's.

Rose's rejection of Winnicott implicitly assumes that the infant is a *tabula rasa* -- a being that has to be "granted" an image. This is related to an important tenet of Lacanian theory: that the human neonate is in biological fragments, unable to use the senses, or to relate the senses to each other. This view is based on a misconception which can be traced back to Freud's (1900, p. 588f.) earliest conjectures about infantile states. The baby is pictured as a bundle of unrelated instinctual pressures, without objects, imperiously and impersonally seeking gratification. Lacan continued this tradition with his concept of the *corps morcelé*. Of course, there is a great deal of truth in the model (which Rose stresses so much) of an originary fragmentation. But the truth of part drives and part objects is not biological in the sense of a primary developmental stage leading up to the mirror stage and the acquisition of language. Unintegration is a psychological phase which persists throughout life (Ehrenzweig; Milner; Winnicott). Being in pieces is an aspect of life, we drift in and out of it, and it is probably no less or more "cultural" than "femininity" and "masculinity."

Now, because Freud tended to think of "primary narcissism" as an originary, biologically-determined stage, his model of development placed a great deal of emphasis on the idea that "reality" is something that is gradually *imposed* from without, and that this is what makes us into social beings. In contrast to this, Lacan argued that it is not reality, but "language," that is imposed from without; it is the "system" of lingual differences that turns us into social beings. Both of these points of view need to be taken into consideration, but it would be misleading to conclude that the psychological function of the "Other" is an objective structure (whether of language or reality), rather than the problematic experience of another person.

At the metatheoretical level, there is not a whole lot of difference between Freud's stress on the reality principle and Lacan's emphasis on language. In either case, we are presented with what critics of Marxian economism call the base/superstructure model, and what critics of behaviourism call the "secondary drive" theory of human sociability. The infrastructure is always some version of the classical image of nature (e.g., the allegedly chaotic randomness of the body untutored by language or the reality ego); and the superstructure is always a conventional image of the arbitrariness of culture (in this case, socialization). The ways in which people actually relate to each other are viewed as wholly arbitrary orderings ("symbolic orders," to use Lacan's phrase) imposed upon the body by some reified external agency, usually called 'society' or 'economy.'

The base/superstructure, secondary drive model works itself out in Rose's account of Lacan through a vision of human sexuality as a wholly ideological construction masking the "fragmented and aberrant nature of sexuality itself (p. 28)." Sexuality as we know it, then -- sexuality as constituted in language -- is an arbitrary fusion of disparate bits and pieces of instinctual nature and unrelated psychic experiences into a false identity, a streamlined discourse inflicted on the hapless subject by the Symbolic Order. Of course, there is no doubt that the emotional meaning of bodily experience is extremely plastic, especially in early childhood, when something like polymorphous perversity is more prevalent. However, the Lacanian theory of infancy supplements this with an implicit myth of origins -- that the state of nature is an originary chaos. If one is going to make a biological hypothesis out of sexual indeterminacy (a standard behaviourist assumption), then one also has to take into account the other psychological facts about neonates: their perceptual, emotional, and social capacities. For, as we have already seen, the newborn child is much more coordinated, aware, and sensitive to the external environment than most academicians were prepared to believe in Lacan's day.



The Text and the Anti-Text

The widespread belief that Lacan represents the only critical development within psychoanalysis since Freud has encouraged an overestimation of the arbitrariness of subjective psychosocial experience. Yet the apparent regularities of human sexuality (which tend to be either wildly exaggerated or grossly underestimated) cannot be explained entirely by the hypothesis of an endlessly displaced instinct or signifier. And so the doctrine of essential sexual randomness seeks compensation in an overly systematized, structural-linguistic (i.e., disembodied) conception of the symbolic process.

Lacan was perhaps the only psychoanalytic innovator of his generation not to take advantage of the fact that symbolization begins in the baby's body, rather than with the father's (Symbolic) intervention against the (Imaginary) "mother-child dual unity." His effective exclusion of the intimate role the mother plays, in Western culture, in the child's symbolic and linguistic development led him to pose the question of the psychic significance of the signifying gesture in an original way. Lacan's emphasis on the link between symbolization and the paternal order had the welcome effect of enriching philosophic criticism of the ideal types of linguistic 'meaning' privileged in the rationalist tradition (Irigaray, 1985).

But the deeper influence of Lacan's thought has been to reinforce the Cartesian ontological split on a new level (cf. Gallop, 1985, pp. 59-60;160). Lacanian deconstruction depends, in practice, on a hypostatization of systems: in the Lacanian tradition, 'play' is derived theoretically from that manipulability of the formal elements

which make up systems of signification, and not from the symbolizing body. The concrete and irreducible -- what cannot be accounted for on the formal plane of rational codification -- tends to be deduced from logical failures of the ideal type, as revealed through manipulation of the linguistic signifier. From this has developed the technique of deconstruction, which always produces the informal as a by-product or effect of the formal. In consequence, post-Lacanian theory has found itself in the unenviable position of having to derive and to explain the tacit and arational dimension of experience, while treating hypothetical "systems," such as language, as given.

According to Jacqueline Rose, language is always moving in two directions, or functioning in contradictory ways. At the superstructural level, language tends toward the *fixing* of meaning, the fusion of signifier and signified, which entails the "positioning" of the subject in the symbolic order and the imposition of an arbitrary sexual identity at the infrastructural level, however, language engenders the *slippage* of meaning, which produces the displacement of the subject and what Rose describes as the "constant failure" of sexuality.

The problem with this account is not that it challenges the capacity of a substantive language to name sexuality, but that it reduces sexuality to the insufficiencies and aporias of the signifying process itself. Sexuality becomes the crisis of universal semiosis. The point is not to deny the confluence of sexuality and language, but to show that the axis of Rose's linguistic perspective in the traditional base-superstructure model generates an abstract opposition between form (inevitably failing language) and material (a hypothetical deduction of sexuality as excess or remainder of linguistic systems), which might be termed the dialectic of the text and the anti-text. The orientation of this epistemological framework is a double one. In the beginning, the world can be known only through the text, the order of writing, which is thus in a sense a kind of originary secondarity. Yet the knowledge gained by means of the text is always re-marked by an Other, the invisible and illusive anti-text, which exercises, *sui generis*, a powerfully disruptive influence.

In Rose's more sober terms, this means that sexuality (and by implication, all of our psychosomatic being, or 'body,' in the psychological sense) is a piece of social writing -- a superimposition, or inscription. "For Lacan...there is no prediscursive reality (p. 55)." On the other hand, Rose is saying, there lies concealed beneath (and in a sense within) this observable but arbitrary order of signifiers, a kind of anti-text, which is like a pure *potentia*, a formless plasticity which subsists in the blanks between the marks -- in the margins, gaps and abysses which inhabit the order of discourse, with its invisible plane of discrete elements

Lacan argued that it is not reality but language that is imposed from without: it is the "system" of lingual differences that turns us into social beings.

arranged in systematic relations of opposition. The internal nothingness of this diacritical function, the *absentia* of *différance*, torments every structure imposed on it, and therefore sexuality itself. Thus Rose's astute definition of sexuality (it "is constituted as a division in language, a division which produces the feminine as its negative term (p. 55)") maps precisely onto the formalist opposition between inchoate 'force' (*différance*, desire, power, nature) and the superstructural plane of aleatory effects (the fictional order of human signs). At its Nietzschean best, this dialectic of presence and absence, mark and blank, phallus and castration, text and anti-text, gives Lacanian Rationalism a wonderfully Dionysian turn; at its worst, however, it deteriorates into the terroristic domination of the "simulacrum," the precession of the model, the combinatory, and the code, of which Jean Baudrillard speaks (1976).



Lacanian Anti-Lacanianism and the Problem of Difference

There has been an endless round of debates about all this. Lacanians, ex-Lacanians, and deconstructionists have argued interminably about whether the phallus is the penis, or is not the penis (e.g., Ragland-Sullivan, 1982), and about whether discourse may after all really be organized around something other than the phallus, some other principle, such as what Samuel Weber (1982) calls the "Thallus," or what Derrida variously termed supplement, hymen, and so on. At stake in all of these debates is the principle of difference -- textual, sexual, and ontological.

One of Freud's greatest contributions was to draw our attention to the extraordinary emotional significance of the human body, and of parts of the body in particular, not least the penis. These parts (which of course include the mouth and anus, and constitute a zonal symbolic quite different from the binary general coding which so preoccupies Lacanians) are not only of narcissistic significance to children, but the sites of enormous struggles which sometimes last a lifetime.

As I have argued, when Lacan discusses the phallus, he is engaging the meanings of the body on a somewhat different plane. "...the phallus is not a phantasy, if by that we mean an imaginary effect. Nor is as such an object (part-, internal, good, bad, etc.) in the sense that this term tends to accentuate the reality pertaining in a relation. It is even less the organ, penis or clitoris, that it symbolizes. And it is not without reason that Freud used the reference to the simulacrum that it represented for the ancients. For the phallus is a signifier whose function...is...to designate as a whole the effects of the signified (1966, p. 285)."

As with the Symbolic, the phallus for Lacan is something abstract, hardly part of the body, or even an experience; it is a metatheoretical function, a digital principle: in structural terms, the differential function of signification; in Gestalt terms (the terms of the mirror stage), the function of the 'figure' (standing out against a ground, but capable of oscillating with it); and in epistemological terms, the function of substitution as an originary condition (the simulacrum), the basic principle of philosophical deconstruction.

The discursive function of the phallus resembles a sort of rationalized version of children's common fantasy about faeces. The wish of the phallic child is that the relations between human bodies of children's common fantasy about faeces. The wish of the phallic child is that the relations between human bodies be simplified into a kind of political economy. In a discursive variant of this, the exchange value would be the signifier, which embodies the condition of serial fungibility. In possession of the idealized (presumably anal) substitutes for the parents' sexual maturity (their breasts and hair, the mysterious insides of the mother's body, the penis, and so on) the phallic child fantasizes a competition with the aggrandized parents, a satisfaction of their desires, a production of babies, even a self-production.

As that which circulates in the form of substitutability (exchange value), the phallus can be neither the metalinguistic nor the metapsychological principle of difference, except insofar as these principles themselves are necessarily simulations. Difference is not a form, it does not circulate -- in other words, it has little to do with the psycho-linguistic ontology which post-Lacanian philosophy has transposed into a theory of textuality. If difference is both significant and originary, then it is unlikely that the phallus, either as a gender sign, or as the *Ursprung* of signification, can have anything *in general* to do with it. Difference is particular. It cannot therefore be systematized, or pinned up on a semiotic grid; which means it cannot be reduced to the general, *formal* principle of the signifier, or to a coded diacritics, or to any of Lacan's "laws" and algorithms of the phallus and the father. But instead of simply abandoning the whole Lacanian paradigm, post-Lacanian thought has become inextricably mired in this problem of reserving difference by universalizing or formalizing it, and then having to rescue difference from the very attempt to save it.

Although difference cannot be thought in terms of the abstract and generalizing (or digital) differences of linguistic and cultural coding, the Lacanian phallus remains an important concept -- not because it is the (dis)seminating 'knot' (*noeud* = penis) from which the textual conscious is unravelled, but precisely because *the phallus is an idealization of desire*. It is a kind of 'defence': a *découpage* of unconscious process, a figural sublimation of desire. Schematically visible (but oscillating and self-

consuming), it functions like the preconscious stratum of a splitting process. Perhaps this is what Lacan meant when he said that the phallus "can play its role only when veiled (1966, p. 288)."

The Oedipal termination of infancy represents the linguistic crisis of the psyche: the marginalization of the dream state and unconscious perception. The phallic defense is erected against the potential loss of the diacritical function itself, the dissolution of formal or conscious difference in regression to unintegrated differences, differences without applied structures to hold them in place for consciousness. In the transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic, the emotional intensity of the infantile body is subordinated to the phallic 'reality principle,' and superceded by the *functions* of differentiation and substitution.

The veiled phallus, the simulacrum, corresponds to the figure-ground problem of Rubin's double profile (cf. Ehrenzweig). The 'signifier' is like the 'right hand' side of the vertical split, the complement of which is the dreaded left hand of castration and death -- the 'abyss.' Like the 'fort' and the 'da' (Lacan, 1953, p. 83), they are both available to consciousness, but mutually exclusive at any given moment. What is intolerable to phallic consciousness is neither the image of power nor the image of nothingness (both manageable idealizations), but the possibility of "dedifferentiation" (Ehrenzweig), the decodifying regression which leaves the psyche defenseless against itself. On the preconscious surface of this undifferentiated difference -- unwilled order (Milner), meaning without theory, body without mind -- the complementary sides of the idealizing split, the 'phallus' and the 'hole,' dance brilliantly back and forth, each reviving as the other fails, never losing themselves in each other.

The problem of idealization, and how it affects human sexuality (as an incorrigible part of it), is an important theme of Jane Gallop's (1985) masterly misreading of Lacan. Gallop approaches the question in the most direct way possible -- through the medium of her transference onto Lacan himself. She works through Lacan's texts in terms of her own impulse to rationalize and split, to idealize and devalue, to double each experience into manageable separate but interchangeable chains of affirmation and negation. A particularly impressive occasion for these reflections occurs in Gallop's encounter with Lacan's famous essay on the phallus.

After some twenty readings, Gallop had noticed that at the top of page 690 of the original French edition of *Ecrits*, the word phallus itself was, inexplicably, not accompanied by the usual masculine article "le," as proper French requires, but by the feminine "La." The ramifications of such a lapsus for a

Lacanians, ex-Lacanians and deconstructionists have argued interminably about whether the phallus is the penis, or is not the penis, and about whether discourse may after all really be organized around something other than the phallus.

close reader of Lacan are far from trivial. Like the phallus itself, the word "La" is, according to Lacan, a signifier without a signified. In the seminar "Encore," he frequently crossed out the feminine article when it appeared in conjunction with the word for 'woman,' declaring, "il n'y a pas la femme, la femme n'est pas toute (Lacan, 1975, pp. 13, 68)." One can imagine Gallop's readerly delight when she encountered the misprint "La phallus" at the very beginning of the page.

"A feeling of exhilaration accompanies my glide from "phallus" to "La." Loaded down with the seriousness of ideological meaning and sexual history, the phallus mires me in its confusion with the male organ. "La" seems to fly above all that in a disembodied ether of pure language, an epicene utopia where "gender is variable at will." But the "La" at the top of page 690 is nearly impossible to read... although I am convinced of the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified, the masculinity of the phallic signifier serves well as an emblem of the confusion between phallus and male which inhere in language, in our Symbolic Order (p. 140)."

In this passage, Gallop traces the two movements of language which Jacqueline Rose described. In the rising (or slipping) phase, the phallus, as signifier, is liberated from the penis, as signified, in order to become the figure of an asexual or perhaps bisexual freedom, the trace of an "epicene utopia." In the falling (or fixing) phase, however, signifier and signified are reconnected, to mark or "fix" the masculinity of the "symbolic order."

Jane Gallop's temptation was to soar. After twenty odd readings of the phallus, her discovery of the misplace "La" makes her feel weightless -- she suddenly inhabits a utopia in which "gender is variable at will." And so it takes all the *avoirdufois* of the penis to bring her back down again.

But Gallop is a brilliant allegorist. There is no question that the signifier (or an alleged "symbolic order") returns Gallop to her body. Gallop just is her body, and never leaves it. She is never the inhabitant of an "epicene utopia," a "disembodied ether of pure language," where "gender is variable at will." What this clever Lacanian tale dramatizes is that there is no escape into language, that there is no such thing as the "liberation of the signifier," except as a fantasy of absconding from physical existence. The only alternative to embodiment is dismemberment or prosthetic hyper-evolution.

But since Lacanian theory is derived from the phallic significance of language, psyche and culture, Lacanian feminism is left with the dismal prospect of endlessly displacing the general significations of signification itself, and thus repeating the whole problematic of the Lacanian text. Such is the strategy evolved through deconstruction: to grant Lacan's ideal function (often performing under another name than the phallus) such a privileged autonomy as to permanently disjoin it

from all play of meaning, all reference to the physical body; or to so generalize the linguistic function of the phallus as to make it mean (or 'fail' to mean) virtually anything. But in either case, the phallic (or formalist) theory of difference only increases the power of the phallus to govern the feminist discourse, while necessarily remaining linked to the genital organs through denial, or repeated denunciations of the confusion between the rarified "Symbolic" and its inevitable referent.

If we take the foregoing as a more or less plausible rendition of what has been going on in radical academic discussion, then the question arises: why is that Lacanianism has become such a successful cottage industry? Why choose Lacan? Perhaps most compelling is the element of carnivalesque mockery which unconsciously drives the public celebration of ideals. The sheer grandiosity of the phallic function in Lacanian discourse is, in other words, virtually indistinguishable from Rabelaisian parody.

But there is another, more dully rationalist explanation. The Lacanian Phallus is, of course, implicated in a primary semantics, an originary loss of meaning, the *Urverdrangung*, which permanently splits the subject from himself, the signifier from the signified, in what Derrida (1981, p. 268) has called "that seminal division." This severance, this primordial absence and abyss, is accepted on the grounds that it is universal: woman no longer stands alone in sufferance of the alleged lack. But this invitation -- the redistribution and equalization of castration -- conceals a revolving door; for immemorial lack is precisely the ground, the metaphysical underpinning, of Lacan's hypostatization of the phallus as the principle of signification in the first place. And that is why the phallus haunts all deconstructive theories of language.

Lacan's arresting ontology of the signifier never traces the movement of desire (as is sometimes claimed for it), but rather the vicissitudes of a defensive displacement of the whole question of the body and the unconscious in the cultural sciences. In this sense, Lacanian psychoanalysis is a salutary intensification of the rationalism of these sciences, a parody of the "linguistic turn," in which all the dead theoretical space of classical Reason, with its ontology of models and its epistemology of the discrete, is finally used up in a kind of self-conscious Hegelian involution.

Sexuality and the subject certainly "fail," as Rose argues, but in a Lacanian universe, they always fail in the same, structurally determinate way, and always in order to return in due time to the same "fix" in the "symbolic order." This kind of simulation of movement is only convincing in a purely textual frame of reference: it enacts an interplay of abstractions: the body reduced to the model of the text, and the rigidity of the text evaded in the ethereal pseudo-naturality of the anti-text. We can see in this way that the Lacanian reading of human sexuality never moves outside the circular paradigm of inscription -- even as it slips in that momentary vision of an epicene utopia: for the "disembodied ether of pure language," the vacuum where the phallus can mean everything and nothing, and "gender is variable at will," is not the recovery of desire, or a reaffirmation of the uncoded (or decoded) body -- but only the splitting and projection, the idealization of the text itself. "A configuration of veils, folds, and quills, writing prepares to receive the seminal spurt of a throw of dice" (Derrida, 1981, p. 285). The endless structural play of abstract oppositions we have inherited (signifier vs. signified, mark vs. blank, phallus vs. castration, writing vs. abyss, presence vs. absence, father vs. mother, culture vs. nature) -- none of this is ever disturbed in the slightest, no matter how it is manipulated, because the digital form of splitting is implicit in the code of inscription that Lacan laid down. The 'phallus' is the essence of textuality as an epistemology.



Notes

1. This paper was first presented at Elspeth Probyn's C.C.A. panel on "Feminist Perspectives in Communication," Winnipeg, June, 1986.
2. One of the implications of Lacan's anchoring of the Symbolic in the paternal phallus is that desire itself is conceived in its most fundamental constitution as little more than a displacement of narcissistic envy, since Lacanian desire has its roots in the "desire of the Other," which for Lacan is originally the mother's projection of 'lack.' Deleuze's Nietzschean reading of Lacanian desire as resentment is thus entirely appropriate.
3. At a recent conference on "post-structuralism(e)" at the University of Ottawa (1983), the addresses of Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, Jacques Alain-Miller, and Stuart Schneiderman all traded on the medico-linguistic fantasy of Lacan's 'discovery' of the 'structures' of the unconscious.
4. The outlook of experimental psychology has changed in the last ten years, largely as a result of more sophisticated infant research. For psychoanalytically oriented summaries

and interpretations of neonatological research, see Daniel Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (New York: Basic Books, 1985) and Victoria Hamilton, *Narcissus and Oedipus: the Children of Psychoanalysis* (London: RKP, 1982). The view of classical and Lacanian psychoanalysis is stated in Juliet Mitchell's review of Hamilton in "Psychoanalysis and Child Development," *New Left Review*, 140 (1983), pp. 92-96.

Selected Bibliography

'DEDIFFERENTIATION,' UNINTEGRATION, REGRESSION:

Ehrenzweig, Anton. *The Hidden Order of Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.

Milner, Marion. *On Not Being Able To Paint*. London: Heinemann, 1957.

Winnicott, D.W. *Playing and Reality*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican, 1971.

METATHEORETICAL STUDIES ON PSYCHOANALYSIS:

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari (1972). *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, et al. New York: Viking, 1977.

Derrida, Jacques. *La carte postale: de Socrate à Freud et au delà*. Paris: Flammarion, 1980.

Dinnerstein, Dorothy. *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.

Gallop, Jane. *Reading Lacan*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian G. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Johnson, Barbara. "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida." In *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text*. Ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, pp. 149-171.

Kofman, Sarah. *The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud's Writings*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Weber, Samuel. *The Legend of Freud*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.

FEMINISM/LACAN/PSYCHOANALYSIS

Gallop, Jane. *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.

Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Kristeva, Julia. "Within the Microcosm of the 'Talking Cure.'" In Smith, Joseph H., and William Kerrigan, eds. *Interpreting Lacan*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

Mitchell, Juliet, and Jacqueline Rose, eds. *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*. New York: Norton, 1982 [Includes two important essays by the editors and selections from Lacan's *Le Séminaire XX: Encore*.]

Ragland-Sullivan, Ellie. "Jacques Lacan: Feminism and the Problem of Gender Identity." *SubStance* 36 (1982), pp. 6-20.

LACAN:

Althusser, Louis (1964). "Freud and Lacan." In *Lenin and Philosophy*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.

Lacan, Jacques (1953). *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Anthony Wilden. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968. [Includes a useful and detailed commentary by Wilden.]

----- (1964). *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican, 1977.

----- (1966). *Écrits: A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1977.

----- *Le Séminaire. Livre XX: Encore*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975.

Lemaire, Anika. *Jacques Lacan*. Trans. D. Macey. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977.

Schneiderman, Stuart. *Jacques Lacan: The Death of an Intellectual Hero*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.

OTHER TEXTS CITED:

Baudrillard, Jean (1976). "The Structural Law of Value and the Order of Simulacra." In *The Structural Allegory: Reconstructive Encounters with the New French Thought*. Ed. John Fekete. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Freud, Sigmund (1900). *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 5. Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth, 1953-74.

----- (1937). "Analysis Terminable and Interminable." Standard Edition, Vol. 23.

Jacobus, Mary. "The Question of Language: Men of Maxims and The Mill on the Floss." In *Writing and Sexual Difference*. Ed. Elizabeth Abel. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. 37-52.

Klein, Melanie (1932). *The Psychoanalysis of Children*. Trans. Alix Strachey. London: Hogarth, 1975.

Sharpe, Ella (1937). *Dream Analysis*. New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1978.

Charles Levin is a writer and student of psychoanalysis. He is the translator of Jean Baudrillard's For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, and currently teaches at Dawson College in Montréal.

