Toril Moi

From Femininity to Finitude: Freud, Lacan, and Feminism, Again

For a long time I used to think that feminists ought to choose Jacques Lacan's femininity theory over Sigmund Freud's. Although I consider Freud the greater thinker, his eternal harping on penis envy and motherhood as the solution to the "problem" of femininity struck me as intellectually wrongheaded, and misogynist too. In a passage that I particularly dislike, Freud claims that a woman of about thirty "often frightens us by her psychical rigidity and unchangeability. . . . Her libido has taken up final positions and seems incapable of exchanging them for others. There are no paths open to further development; it is as though the whole process had already run its course and remains thenceforward insusceptible to influence—as though, indeed, the difficult development to femininity had exhausted the possibilities of the person concerned" (1933, 134–35).

These words are terrifying. Freud appears genuinely to believe that at the age of thirty these women will never change.[1] Their lives are deprived of transcendence, Simone de Beauvoir would have said, for she thought of the future as the horizon toward which all human beings constantly reach. On this view, it is because the future is open, because we live in time, that human existence is a continuous becoming and not a fixed essence. This continuous becoming only stops at death. Deprived of a

I want to thank my students at Duke University, who have read and reread Freud and Lacan with me over the years. This article is dedicated to them. Various versions of this article were substantially improved by the comments of Genevieve Abravanel, Nancy Bauer, Christine Hamm, Diana Knight, Ruth Leys, Ghislaine McDayter, and Gabriel M. Paletz. Renata Salecl, Ranji Khanna, and Anne F. Garréta also offered helpful comments, as did my friend and colleague Sarah Beckwith. Needless to say, none of them is responsible for my views. I also wish to thank those who invited me to present versions of this article to a range of widely different audiences: Mildred Dubitzky in San Francisco, Irène Matthis in Stockholm, Paul Allen Miller and Greg Forter in Columbia, South Carolina, and, finally, Afsaneh Najmabadi and Mari Ruti in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[1] Freud's interest in the decay of women of thirty had deep cultural roots in Europe. The best example is probably Honoré de Balzac's *La femme de trente ans* (The Woman of Thirty), which the author started to write at the age of twenty-nine ([1842] 1931).

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future, these rigid, unchanging women of thirty are the living dead, the Nosferatus of the soul. No wonder Freud finds them frightening.

Compared to this, Lacan seemed positively upbeat. For him, femininity is a position constructed in language, a position that can be taken up by men as well as women. Here, I thought, there was more of a promise of freedom for women. Moreover, I have always felt particularly constricted by essentialist theories about women's nature: if the difference between Freud and Lacan was that Freud's femininity theory was essentialist whereas Lacan's was constructionist, I knew which one I preferred.

Over the years, however, I came to change my mind—not about Freud's theories about women but about their relative merits compared to those of Lacan. Reading Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for whom the concrete living body is a historically embedded situation, constantly created through interactions with others and the world, I came to see that Freud's general theory about the relationship between the body and sexed subjectivity (as opposed to his specific theory of women's difference) was not so different from theirs, that he too thought of the body as concrete, historical, and open to change. In such theories the opposition between essence and construction does not apply.[2]

Lacan's famous linguistic turn, on the other hand, transforms the body into an abstract cipher, a purely idealist construct. Lacan does not explicitly reject Freud's theory about the way in which psychosexual subjectivity is developed in relation to the person's sexed and gendered body. Lacan's work still presupposes that theory. Yet Lacan never really engages with this aspect of Freud's thought, and as he moves toward post-Saussurean linguistics, the concrete living body is increasingly left unmentioned. This is a pity, for Freud's understanding of the body and subjectivity is promising material for feminists. (In my view, Beauvoir's analysis of how one becomes a woman draws on a very similar understanding of the body.)[3] When Freud himself tries to theorize women, however, the results are pitiful. He is, for example, mistaken about penis envy, clitoral and vaginal pleasure, motherhood as a compensation for penis envy, women's general preference for sons over daughters, the unchangeability of women of thirty, and about much more too. (Is it really true, for example, that women have a less punitive superego than men?)[4]

[2] In an essay called "Is Anatomy Destiny?" I show how I arrive at this conclusion. The essay is reprinted in *What Is a Woman?* (Moi 1999, 369–93). The present article returns to some of the questions left unanswered in "Is Anatomy Destiny?"

[3] See *The Second Sex*, particularly the chap. called "Childhood" (Beauvoir [1949] 1989).

[4] See, e.g., Horney 1973; Mitchell 1974; Benjamin 1988; Chodorow 1993; McDougall 1995; Mitchell 2000, just to mention a few important works in English.

At the same time as I was reading Freud with Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty, I was also studying Ludwig Wittgenstein, J. L. Austin, and Stanley Cavell. Their understanding of language and meaning made the post-Saussurean view of language that underpins Lacan's theory appear flawed. I also came to feel increasingly uneasy about the opposition between "construction" and "essence" that had pushed me toward Lacan in the first place.[5] Soon I reached the point where I could no longer understand something that had once seemed luminously clear, namely, exactly what it means to say that something—femininity, for example—is "outside language," or "beyond the phallus."

In this situation, the old feminist accusations against psychoanalysis returned to haunt me. Castration, in particular, has always been particularly troublesome to feminists. Women are castrated. Femininity is an effect of castration (often euphemistically renamed "lack"), woman is a void, a nothingness. Why would women have anything to do with a theory that makes such claims? Of course, the counterarguments instantly come to mind: don't worry, we are all castrated; femininity is nothing but a sliding signifier that can attach itself to any body. Yes, of course. But although we are all castrated, all marked by lack, women somehow come across as more castrated than men, just as the signifier of femininity gets attached to female bodies far more often than to male ones. And why are women, but not men, exhorted to be, remain, become feminine? If women fail to conform to the theorist's particular picture of femininity, why is this always presented as a problem for women but not for the theory?

In short: the old certainties were gone. It was time to return to Freud and Lacan, yet again. This article is the result of that rereading. But why reread Freud and Lacan on femininity today? The great majority of practicing analysts have long since abandoned classical Freudian and Lacanian femininity theories and quite rightly insist that they do not analyze women with such notions in mind. Some analysts, not least in France, nevertheless remain inspired by Lacan's understanding of sexual difference. And even analysts who have no time for Lacan may be interested in seeing what insights a new reading of some classic psychoanalytic texts will yield. In contemporary cultural and literary theory the situation is different. In these fields Lacan's concepts of castration and femininity, as well as Lacanian ideas about what is or is not outside language, are still central, and

[5] I write at length about this opposition in the title essay of *What Is a Woman?* (Moi 1999, 3–120).

every year all over the world professors teach Lacan's texts on femininity to new generations of students.[6]

In this article I shall focus mostly on Lacan. But since Lacan's theory is based on a close reading of Freud, I shall start by taking a brief look at some aspects of Freud's understanding of femininity that are not so frequently discussed, before turning to the relationship between the penis and the phallus (yet again). I shall pay special attention to Lacan's post-Saussurean "linguistic turn." I shall show that when the phallus becomes a signifier, an already dubious theory of femininity as an effect of castration is wedded to a theory that postulates the existence of a realm outside language, to which femininity and its metaphysical ghost, *jouissance*, are relegated. An important part of my argument is that Lacan's post-Saussurean linguistics encounters serious challenges from recent interpretations of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. Then I shall show that the Lacanian concept of castration slides among three different definitions in ways that make it both muddled and sexist. Finally, I shall suggest that we can become clearer on what work the concept of castration can and cannot do for us if we reconsider it in the light of a different concept, namely, finitude. I take this concept from Cavell but revise it in the light of work by women analysts such as Joyce McDougall and Colette Chiland.

This article is based on the assumption that psychoanalysis does not need a theory of femininity at all. (Feminism does not need one either, but there is no space for that discussion here.) Freud's quest for the "riddle of femininity" is never matched by a similar quest for the "riddle of masculinity." Both Freud and Lacan appear to think that psychoanalytic theory can get along fine without a theory of masculinity. In this way, *femininity* and *sexual difference* come across as synonymous terms. Men become the norm, women the problem to be explained; men embody humanity, women remain imprisoned in their feminine difference. Psychoanalysis does not need such a theory of sexual difference. What it does need is a new understanding of the wide range of different ways of becoming a woman in the world.[7]

My critique of femininity theory does not presuppose a return to any

[6] This is not just a Western phenomenon; Lacan is taught in humanities departments all over the globe.

[7] Freud and Lacan are of course not the only psychoanalysts who try to theorize women. To investigate post-Freudian femininity theories from Karen Horney and Helene Deutsch through Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray to Jessica Benjamin and Nancy Chodorow would be the task of a book. Perhaps this article can be thought of as a kind of preface to such investigations.

kind of equality theory.[8] As Beauvoir herself was the first to stress, to encounter the world in a female body is simply not the same thing as to encounter it in a male body. We note, for example, that when a man is described as feminine, whether by femininity theorists or anyone else, the meaning of the word is no longer exactly the same as when a woman is described as feminine. We need more historically specific, more situated, and far more clearly defined accounts of women's lived experience and women's subjectivity than femininity theories can produce.[9] To reject femininity theory, then, is not to reject the *fact* of sexual difference. It is to reject theories that *equate* femininity and sexual difference, as if women were the only bearers of sex. Femininity theories inevitably and relentlessly turn women into the other.

A final introductory point: this is not an essay on the relationship between feminism and psychoanalysis in general. To develop the history and theory of that complex interaction would require a book, not just an essay. I take for granted that psychoanalysis has been and will remain an immensely useful theory for feminism. Psychoanalysis has given us a whole series of concepts that are invaluable to feminists and other cultural critics: the unconscious, desire, fantasy, identification, projection, transference, countertransference, alienation, narcissism—the list could continue for a long time. This article is not about those concepts.[10] The task I have set for myself here is simply this: to work out a critique of two major psychoanalytic concepts, namely, femininity and castration, through a rereading of some fundamental texts by Freud and Lacan. I bring to bear on these texts a perspective informed by Beauvoir and Wittgenstein. As far as I know, this has not been done before.

[8] I hope to write a separate essay about equality, difference, and feminist theory someday.

[9] Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* ([1953] 1989) is an example of the kind of investigation of women's lived experience that I am looking for. Beauvoir at once rejects femininity theories and tries to account for the specific ways in which the fact of being a woman comes to matter to the individual woman and to society.

[10] Some of Lacan's most brilliant ideas are not at all caught up in femininity talk and have nothing to do with the nature of language and the beyond. His account of subject formation as an effect of alienation in the mirror stage, for example, so impressed Beauvoir that she made it foundational to *The Second Sex* (see Lacan [1938] 1984). William F. Bracken's dissertation "Becoming Subjects: The Agency of Desire in Lacan's Return to Freud" shows how philosophically interesting this theory is (1998).

Freud: The riddle of femininity

Freud recognized that he spoke about femininity in ways that did not "always sound friendly" to women.[11] The most obvious reason for his churlishness is his failure to grasp the cultural and historical specificity of his own insights. Freud writes as if the women in analysis with him embodied eternal femininity. Yet any clearheaded reading of his descriptions of women will find massive evidence of the time-bound nature of his views.[12] His remark about the women of thirty is just one example.

Of course, Freud was unhappy about the sorry psychological state of women of thirty. "As therapists we lament this state of things," he writes (1933, 135). Yet—and this is what I find hard to forgive—he is as unable to envisage change as the neurotic women he describes. Just as they horrify him by their rigidity, Freud horrifies me. When he writes that the "difficult development to femininity had exhausted the possibilities" of these women, he is at once perceptive and blind. Yes, I want to say: these women *are* paying the price for having to play the part of "normal" women in a rigidly (hetero)sexist society. But it is their *situation*, not the intrinsic demands of their reproductive and sexual tasks, that has frozen their psyche.[13] If Freud had acknowledged that he *was* talking about socially oppressed women in a historically specific situation, then he would surely have hesitated to generalize about some mysterious entity called "femininity" that necessarily exhausts women by the time they are out of their twenties.

We need to distinguish between Freud's general understanding of psychosexual development and his theory of femininity. The idea, for example, that children's discovery of bodily sexual differences is crucial to their development of a sexed and gendered identity doesn't *have to* lead straight to the claim that when a little girl discovers that her brother has a penis, then she will instantly feel inferior. Yet that is the claim that grounds the whole theory of castration and lack for Freud. One can object to this particular story without objecting to a more nuanced, historically and culturally specific account of the many different psychosexual options

[11] "That is all I had to say to you about femininity. It is certainly incomplete and fragmentary and does not always sound friendly," Freud writes in his 1933 essay on "Femininity" (1933, 135). All references to Freud are to *The Standard Edition* (1953–74).

[12] This is not just a feminist gripe, for many analysts have said the same thing. McDougall, for example, writes: "Although he believed himself to be an objective observer, Freud's two renowned articles on female sexuality reveal, in limpid fashion, the extent to which he was imbued with the conventional, moralistic attitude of his day" (1995, 220).

[13] The best theorist of the concept of situation in relation to women is, of course, Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex* ([1953] 1989). See also my discussion of the concept in Moi 1999, 59–83.

available to little girls when they discover that there are at least two sexes and that their own sex is only one of them. To reject this particular story is not to reject psychoanalysis, for nondogmatic psychoanalysts, whether feminist or not, have tried to develop a better story ever since Freud first launched his.

Many feminists have tried to rescue Freud's story by saying that what girls discover is not the superiority of the penis but the social inferiority of their own sex.[14] But even this presupposes too much homogeneity in culture and among women. For some girls grow up in families or in subcultures dominated by women. The discovery of sexual difference and the discovery of sexism are not necessarily simultaneous, and they certainly cannot always be summed up under the heading of "lack" or "castration."

A point that has not generally been noticed is that insofar as Freud's theory of femininity is based on a story of what all girls *must* feel when they discover anatomical sexual difference, it actually runs counter to his own understanding of the nature of psychoanalytic inquiry. This becomes clear if we look at the 1920 essay "Case of Homosexuality in a Woman." In this essay Freud tries to find out why a specific young woman became a lesbian. Putting together quite a plausible narrative, he stresses the girl's strong oedipal desire for her father, which suffered a bitter blow when the young woman was sixteen and her mother gave birth to her third brother. Freud then stresses that he would never claim that any girl in the same situation was bound to become a lesbian:

> So long as we trace the development from its final outcome backwards, the chain of events appears continuous, and we feel we have gained an insight which is completely satisfactory or even exhaustive. But if we proceed the reverse way, if we start from the premises inferred from the analysis and try to follow these up to the final result, then we no longer get the impression of an inevitable sequence of events which could not have been otherwise determined. We notice at once that there might have been another result, and that we might have been just as well able to understand and explain the latter. The synthesis is thus not so satisfactory as the analysis; in other words, from a knowledge of the premises we could not have foretold the nature of the result. (1920, 167)

To use metaphors occasionally used by Freud: the analyst is like a detective or an archaeologist; piecing together the analytic evidence, she is an expert at unraveling what *has* happened, not at predicting what *will* happen.

[14] The most famous exponent of this view is Juliet Mitchell (1974).

(This makes analysis more like literary criticism and less like the social and natural sciences than Freud probably wanted to admit.) Insofar as femininity theory tells a story about *what is bound to happen* when a little girl discovers that she doesn't have a penis, it is a troubled attempt at "synthesis and prediction," with predictably flawed results.

To be fair, Freud openly admitted that his femininity theory gave him trouble. Yet his most explicit admission of trouble does not refer to castration (on the contrary, as we shall see, his last word on the matter of femininity reaffirms the belief in castration as the bedrock of femininity) but to an earlier idea, first formulated in 1905 in *Three Essays on Sexuality*, that femininity was passivity. In a footnote added to the text in 1915 Freud writes: "'Masculine' and 'feminine' are used sometimes in the sense of activity and passivity, sometimes in a biological, and sometimes, again, in a sociological sense. The first of these three meanings is the essential one and the most serviceable in psychoanalysis" (1905, 219). The obvious counterargument is that if Freud wants to speak of passivity, why can't he just do so? Why does he need to claim that femininity is *synonymous* with passivity, particularly when this has the unfortunate side effect of implying that all women are passive and that no man is?

Freud saw the force of the objection, for in the same footnote he writes: "Every individual . . . displays a mixture of the character-traits belonging to his own and to the opposite sex; and he shows a combination of activity and passivity whether or not these last character-traits tally with his biological ones" (1905, 220). (This concession inspired many theories concerning bisexuality, a fact Freud later explicitly deplores, as we shall see.) But the concession does not clarify the matter. Rather, confusion now sets in. For if men and women don't display unmixed masculinity and femininity, how can we tell what qualities "belong" to either sex? If I see a bit of passive behavior, how am I supposed to know that it is feminine even if it occurs in a man? Isn't the sex of the person in question after all the bedrock on which Freud's adjudications of femininity or masculinity rest? Or to put it differently: On what grounds does Freud decide that the most fundamental meaning of femininity is passivity? Why is this not simply an arbitrary metaphor determined not by scientific insight but by sexist ideology?

Despite his own misgivings, Freud nevertheless stuck to the theory of femininity as passivity for almost twenty years. Perhaps it had something to do with his steadfast conviction that women had to give up "active" clitoral pleasure for "passive" vaginal pleasure if they were to become fully feminine. However that may be, in the 1933 essay on femininity that

contains the distressing passage on women of thirty, Freud finally acknowledged the force of the objection:

> Even in the sphere of human sexual life you soon see how inadequate it is to make masculine behaviour coincide with activity and feminine with passivity. . . . Women can display great activity in various directions, men are not able to live in company with their own kind unless they develop a large amount of passive adaptability. If you now tell me that these facts go to prove precisely that both men and women are bisexual in the psychological sense, I shall conclude that you have decided in your own minds to make "active" coincide with "masculine" and "passive" with "feminine." But I advise you against it. It seems to me to serve no useful purpose and adds nothing to our knowledge. (1933, 115)

This is a strong indictment of his own previous theory. Yet Freud does not conclude that he should give up defining femininity. It is as if some picture of how things *must* be held Freud captive, forcing him to produce an account of femininity that did not correspond to the full range of his own analytic and theoretical insights.[15] The Freudian quest for femininity is fueled by the idea that all women simply *must* be psychologically different from all men. This difference is imagined to be something like an entity, a new element to be uncovered, analyzed, and described by intrepid discoverers. We "must conclude," Freud writes, "that what constitutes masculinity or femininity is an unknown characteristic which anatomy cannot lay hold of" (1933, 114). This "unknown characteristic" is the mysterious "riddle of femininity" (1933, 116), the Holy Grail of psychoanalytic inquiry.[16]

But must we imagine femininity as a thing or a quality? Here I have reached the same terrain as Cavell, who notes that we have yet to determine "how it is that the question of sexual difference turns into a question of some property that men are said to have that women lack, or perhaps vice versa—a development that helps to keep us locked into a compulsive uncertainty about whether we wish to affirm or to deny difference between men and women" (1996, 98). Beauvoir registers the same uncertainty as

[15] The kind of picture I have in mind is this: "A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably" (Wittgenstein [1953] 1968, sec. 115).

[16] Anyone interested in further investigation of the concept of femininity in Freud should also look at the following texts, which I do not discuss in this article: Freud 1908, 1912, 1918, 1924, 1930, and 1931.

the experience of being offered an impossible "choice" between being imprisoned in her sexed subjectivity or of being forced to repress it entirely.[17]

Freud's picture makes him believe that without a theory that explains women's difference, psychoanalysis is not complete. Yet psychoanalysts have never set off on a quest for the key to the "riddle of masculinity." Freud's male patients are studied as cases of obsession, hysteria, sadism, or masochism, not as cases of more or less stunted "masculinity," and they are never said to be "feminine" if, say, they choose not to have children. For Freud, to speak of sexual difference is to speak of femininity, and vice versa. Men are human beings, women are sexed; masculinity is universal, femininity particular. In *The Second Sex* Beauvoir ironically sums up the attitude: "Just as for the ancients there was an absolute vertical with reference to which the oblique was defined, so there is an absolute human type, the masculine. Woman has ovaries, a uterus: there we have specific circumstances that imprison her in her subjectivity; one often says that she thinks with her glands" (Beauvoir [1953] 1989, xxi, trans. amended).[18]

The quest for femininity seriously damages the credibility of psychoanalysis.[19] Descartes thought that the pineal gland was the site of the soul (or, to be specific, the place where the soul encounters the body). A century ago biologists were still trying to isolate the "vital force" [*élan vital*]. Just as philosophy has long since given up trying to pinpoint the soul, biologists have given up looking for a single essence to explain all biological mechanisms. It is time to give up the fantasy of finding the key to the "riddle of femininity." Women are not sphinxes. Or rather: they are no more and no less sphinxlike than men. There is no riddle to solve.

[17] See my discussion of this dilemma in Moi 1999, 202–7.

[18] For the French text see Beauvoir (1949) 1986, vol. 1, 14. Some people think that Beauvoir's ideas of femininity are as retrograde as Freud's. I cannot engage in that discussion here, but I have tried to show why this is wrong, e.g., in the title essay of *What Is a Woman?* (Moi 1999).

[19] In *Mad Men and Medusas* Mitchell claims that Freud's theory of femininity is not a theory of femininity but of hysteria. By the late 1920s, Mitchell argues, all the features Freud used to consider characteristic of hysteria had been transferred to the concept of femininity: "When at the end of his life, Freud claimed that the bedrock beneath which psychoanalysis could not penetrate was the more or less biological one of a universal tendency by both sexes to repudiate femininity, he was making the mistake that has been widely reiterated: it is hysteria that cannot be tolerated, the conditions of hysteria that everyone wishes to repudiate" (Mitchell 2000, 186). I don't know whether Mitchell thinks that there still could be a good psychoanalytic theory of femininity.

The phallus and the penis: Bodies, norms, and symbols in Lacan

Since Lacanian theory defines femininity as a specific relationship to the phallus, no discussion of femininity in Lacan can afford to overlook what he has to say about this contested symbol. The first thing to note is that all who approach Lacan are ritually warned not to confuse penis and phallus.[20] Feminists are usually singled out as particularly obtuse in this respect. Even the otherwise sensible McDougall can't resist a cheap shot: "The word *phallus* is often used indiscriminately in English to mean *penis*. Feminist writers engaged in detecting and denouncing denigratory attitudes toward women fulminate against the use of the word *phallus*. That they equate *penis* and *phallus* suggests, paradoxically, a hidden phallocentric attitude on their part!" (McDougall 1995, 6). There appears to be a little psychoanalytic tradition here, for Freud too enjoyed making jokes at the expense of feminists who persist in asking for equal rights, as if they had not noticed the obvious "morphological" differences between the sexes.[21]

The taboo on confusing phallus and penis stems from Lacan's own writing. In his famous 1958 essay "The Meaning of the Phallus," Lacan insists that anyone can take up the symbolic positions labeled masculine and feminine: "[The clinical facts] go to show that the relation of the subject to the phallus is set up regardless of the anatomical difference between the sexes" (Lacan [1958] 1982b, 76). The word *regardless* [*sans égard à*] is a strong one.[22] It has usually been taken to mean that anatomical configuration has absolutely nothing to do with symbolic position or, in other words, that the relationship between phallus and body is *arbitrary*. This view has been particularly appealing to feminists looking for an antiessentialist theory of sexual difference.

But is it true? Does this interpretation find support in Lacan's own text? And what about the more fundamental objection, which anyone who has ever taught Lacan will recognize, for there is always someone who asks "Why does the phallus have to be called phallus, if it has nothing to do with the penis?" A variation on this question is "Why does femininity

[20] Jane Gallop puts it well: "Probably all Lacan's advocates somewhere make the point that his detractors misread him by failing to distinguish the phallus from the penis" (1985, 134).

[21] "Here the feminist demand for equal rights for the sexes does not take us far, for the morphological distinction is bound to find expression in differences of psychical development" (Freud 1924, 177). Chiland succinctly rejects the belief that anybody who fights for equal rights for women must deny all sexual differences (see 1999, 15).

[22] For the French text, see Lacan 1966, 686.

have to be called femininity if it has nothing to do with women?" Such questions deserve more attention than they usually get, for both have to do with the relationship between symbols and bodies, and the second also raises the question of the relationship between symbolic function and social norms or ideology.

What is one to reply? We can start by rereading "The Meaning of the Phallus," where it appears that Lacan too transgresses the taboo on confusing the phallus with the penis: "This test of the desire of the Other is not decisive in the sense that the subject learns from it whether or not he has a real phallus [*un phallus réel*], but inasmuch as he learns that the mother does not," he writes (Lacan [1958] 1982b, 83).[23] There is, then, such a thing as a "real phallus," and the one thing we know about it is that mothers do not have it.[24] The crucial explanation of why it is that the "phallus is the privileged signifier" in the first place (Lacan [1958] 1982b, 82) is equally revealing: "One might say that this signifier is chosen as what stands out [*le plus saillant*] as most easily seized upon in the real of sexual copulation, and also as the most symbolic in the literal (typographical) sense of the term, since it is the equivalent in that relation of the (logical) copula. One might also say that by virtue of its turgidity, it is the image of the vital flow [*flux vital*] as it is transmitted [*passe*] in generation" (Lacan [1958] 1982b, 82).[25]

Lacan chose the phallus as the privileged signifier because it juts out in sexual intercourse; because in that act it functions as a copula (a verb of predication, a verb conferring being); because its turgidity illustrates both the way in which semen is transferred in intercourse and the way in which the generations succeed each other. (The reference to generation,

[23] For the French text, see Lacan 1966, 693.

[24] Many readers of Lacan have stumbled over the "real phallus." In *Reading Lacan* Gallop proposes that we read it ironically yet not without criticism: "Thus his 'real phallus' would be simply an ironic use of the term, his mockery of the way others understand it. So be it. But nonetheless I think that such subtleties of irony never leave their user uncontaminated" (Gallop 1985, 144). Irony is a matter of tone: I do not hear irony in the sentence in question. Be that as it may. Tim Dean thinks the "real phallus" has to do with the Lacanian real: "The way in which the real functions as a logical limit prompts Lacan to speak of a real phallus, for *jouissance* is real, and the phallus signifies a limit to the *jouissance* we can access" (Dean 2000, 88). I think it is highly unlikely that Lacan's reference to the real phallus in 1958 has anything to do with setting a limit to *jouissance*, which was only theorized in 1972–73.

[25] For the French text, see Lacan 1966, 692.

moreover, makes it obvious that throughout this chapter Lacan is thinking only of heterosexuality.)[26]

Now we can see that the question "why is the phallus called the phallus if it has nothing to do with the penis?" is somewhat off the mark. Lacan does not at all deny that the symbol of the phallus is based on the image of the erect penis; on the contrary, he flaunts the fact that it is. But so what? Lacan is simply inviting us to grasp the difference between the phallus as a symbol, as a signifier, and the penis as an ordinary part of male anatomy. Is this really too much to ask? Let us grant the case. It is obvious that the word *phallus* will conjure up images of penislike objects. It is also clear that some human beings have a penis and others don't. But once the symbol has been defined in sophisticated, theoretical terms as something nobody has, then it is absurd to reduce the symbolic phallus back to the ordinary penis, supporters of Lacan might say.

This is a perfectly reasonable point. It is obvious that in Lacanian theory the phallus soon comes to mean a lot more than just the (erect) penis. To deny this would be obtuse. What feminists object to is not, of course, the use of symbols but the *particular symbol* chosen to signify difference and lack, as well as the theory of sexual difference that supports itself on the phallus/penis equation. However much we approve of symbolic uses of words for body parts, we may still object that if the relationship between anatomy and symbol is entirely arbitrary, then there really is no reason to

[26] Lacanian theory has indeed been used to support heterosexist positions, e.g., in the French debates about the so-called *pacs* (pacts of civic solidarity, a form of marriage for homosexuals and heterosexuals). Dean would disagree with me. He is critical of the concept of the phallus but nevertheless finds explicit criticism of heterosexuality in the essay I am discussing here. Lacan, he writes, "consistently pokes fun at the heterosexist *idée reçu* [*sic*] that genital relations between the sexes represent an idea for psychological maturity" (Dean 2000, 49). The passage he adduces for this claim is the following, which I quote in Jacqueline Rose's translation: "Admittedly it was French psychoanalysts, with their hypocritical notion of genital oblativity, who started up the moralizing trend which, to the tune of Salvationist choirs, is now followed everywhere" (Lacan [1958] 1982a, 81). I think that Dean misreads this passage. The key phrase here is "genital oblativity," which means something like "self-sacrificing genitality." This is not a critique of heterosexuality but of Daniel Lagache. Lagache was Lacan's contemporary and a leading French analyst in the 1950s. His two-volume opus *La jalousie amoureuse* contains a theory of different types of love (Lagache 1947). One is "oblative love" [*amour oblatif*], defined as totally self-sacrificing, heterosexual love (Lagache makes patient Griselda look like the ideal wife). To criticize the idea that heterosexual sexuality is devotedly self-sacrificing is hardly to criticize heterosexuality as such. (For more information about Lagache, see Roudinesco 1986, 227–35.)

choose the phallus rather than the breast as the transcendental signifier of difference.

Because the phallus represents the threat of castration, it produces sexual difference, the Lacanian theory goes. By taking up a position in relation to the phallus, we become at one stroke sexed and subjects. This is the entry into the symbolic order, into language, the subjection to the Law, our fundamental subjection to castration, to lack. (This sentence is based on the observation that Lacanians usually treat "language," "the Law," and "the symbolic order" in the same way. If this obscures some necessary distinctions, I am looking forward to being corrected, for a serious account of the way in which Lacan and Lacanians actually use these terms is much needed.) The phallus distributes humankind in two sexes, but the sexes we are talking about are entirely symbolic, entirely psychosexual. On this theory, however, women shouldn't take up a position as feminine more often than men. Yet—and this is what generations of students are struck by—in "The Meaning of the Phallus" Lacan clearly thinks that women will take up the feminine and men the masculine position. What he means when he says that the "relation of the subject to the phallus is set up regardless of anatomical difference" is that there will always be *exceptions* to the rule, not that there is no rule whatsoever.

Feminine subjects, Lacan writes, will struggle in vain to *be* the phallus; masculine subjects will struggle in vain to *have* the phallus ([1958] 1982b, 84). As a result, both sexes end up acting in a comedy, but femininity in particular is a masquerade, an endless performance in which women try to mask the lack of the phallus.[27] Here I just wrote "women." Shouldn't I say "feminine subjects?" Not necessarily, for Lacan writes "women" too (or "the woman," to be exact):

> Paradoxical as this formulation might seem, I would say that it is in order to be the phallus, that is to say, the signifier of the desire of the Other, that the woman will reject an essential part of her femininity [*de la féminité*], notably all its attributes through masquerade. It is for what she is not that she expects to be desired as well as loved. But she finds the signifier of her own desire in the body of the one [*celui*] to whom she addresses her demand for love. Certainly we should not forget that the organ actually invested with this sig-

[27] Lacan writes: "This follows from the intervention of an 'appearing' which gets substituted for the 'having' so as to protect it on one side and to mask its lack on the other" ([1958] 1982a, 84).

> nifying function takes on the value of a fetish. (Lacan [1958] 1982b, 84)

If I understand Lacan correctly here, he is saying that because the woman doesn't have a penis, she will perform a masquerade in which she aims to *be* the phallus. He then says that this entails rejecting an essential part of femininity [*de la féminité*]. But since femininity is defined as the masquerade the woman performs, how can that masquerade in itself be a rejection of an "essential part of femininity"? The answer can be found if we consider that the word *femininity* here is a translation of the French *féminité*.[28] Depending on the context, that word can mean "feminine," "female," "women's," or "of women." If we translate *féminité* here as "femaleness," the sentence makes perfect sense, since it now introduces a difference between the psychosexual *féminité* acted out in the masquerade and the anatomical *féminité* disavowed by the same masquerade. What the woman rejects, then, is something specific to women's bodies or genitals, namely, the absence of a penis. (This is exactly Freud's point in "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" [Freud 1937], which Lacan invokes at the beginning of "The Meaning of the Phallus" and to which I shall return.)

In this passage, Lacan speaks of women, not men. *Women* will take up the feminine position; by fetishizing the male organ *women* will find the phallus they desire on the body of their male lover. This appears to contradict Lacan's claim that the "relation of the subject to the phallus is set up regardless of anatomical difference between the sexes." Yet the only word that causes the contradiction is *regardless*, which now appears as an overstatement. I am led to conclude that Lacan's theory cannot live up to that *regardless*, for it seems to go as follows: the difference between the sexes turns on their different relationship to the penis—one sex has it, the other does not. This fact then structures the relationship of each sex to the phallus. But anatomy is not the final arbiter of symbolic position, for it is acknowledged that exceptions to the rule will occur. Some men will take up a feminine position, just as some women will take up a masculine position.

Lacan's femininity theory, then, is based on normative expectations about the psychosexual position women will take up (as a rule) and the one men will take up (as a rule). *In most cases* the presence or absence of a penis determines the relationship to the phallic signifier; *to a very large extent* anatomical sex does predict one's symbolic position. For Lacan,

[28] For the French text, see Lacan 1966, 694.

then, the relationship between body and sexed subjectivity is neither necessary (that would be biological determinism) nor arbitrary (that would be a form of idealism, a denial of the material structure of the body) but *contingent*. It is contingent and not necessary because not all women will take up a feminine position, just as not all men will take up a masculine position; it's not arbitrary since there is a general expectation that women on the whole will take up a feminine position. Structurally, then, Lacan's femininity theory is exactly the same as Freud's.[29]

There is nothing sexist about this kind of theory about the relationship between bodies and psychosexual identities. All it means is that for Lacan as for Freud and Beauvoir, one is not born but rather becomes a woman: "Psycho-analysis does not try to describe what a woman is—that would be a task it could scarcely perform," Freud wrote in 1933, "but sets about enquiring how she comes into being, how a woman develops out of a child with a bisexual disposition" (Freud 1933, 116).[30] Problems arise only when normative expectations are coded into such theories, and this is where Beauvoir differs from Freud and Lacan. For Beauvoir does not presume to define any kind of normative femininity, whereas Freud and Lacan do.

Lacan's understanding of the *relationship* between the body and sexed subjectivity, then, is neither better nor worse than Freud's; it's the same. Feminists who choose Lacan over Freud because they believe that Lacan's theory is less essentialist are mistaken. Neither Freud nor Lacan is an essentialist. They both consider the relationship between the body and the psyche to be contingent. The difference, as I have already stressed, is in their understanding of the *body*. Freud always remained concerned with the concrete, phenomenological body, whereas Lacan turns the body into an entirely abstract and idealist concept.

Different critics have reacted differently to the connection between phallus and penis (I mean those critics who, like me, admit that there is

[29] Received opinion is that whereas Freud was a biological determinist, Lacan theorizes gender in a more progressive manner. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan is one among many to voice such a view: "Freud's error was to mistake a structural, symbolic, and representational drama for a natural one based on biology. . . . [Lacan] argued that a person becomes male or female by identifying (or not) as the phallic signifier, and not by any innate mechanism" (Ragland-Sullivan 1987, 269). My argument is that neither Freud nor Lacan are biological determinists but that Lacan's structuralism makes him far more metaphysical than Freud.

[30] Beauvoir drew on Lacan for her understanding of girls' psychosexual development. The key Lacanian term for her was *alienation* and the key text a long encyclopedia entry by Lacan from 1938, published separately much later as *Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l'individu* (Lacan [1938] 1984).

one). Gallop's brilliant analysis of the intricate relationship between penis and phallus ends with a plea for confusion, perceived as a way to connect the body with history: "To read for and affirm confusion, contradiction is to insist on the thinking in the body in history. Those confusions mark the sites where thinking is literally knotted to the subject's historical and material place" (1988, 132). Inspired by Gallop, Charles Bernheimer recommends that we insist on the "phallus's penile reference" since this would force psychoanalytic theory to account for historical specificity and bodily materiality (1995, 323). Lacan's elevation of the phallus to universal signifying status, Bernheimer writes, amounts to the "body's strangulation by the signifying chain and the consequent elimination of such material factors as history, race and power from the theorization of subjectivities" (1995, 337). I have much sympathy for Gallop's and Bernheimer's general wish to reconnect the Lacanian body with history, but in my view Lacan's concept of the body is so abstract that it can never be successfully historicized.[31]

Lacan's theory of sexual difference also strikes me as worse than Freud's.[32] While both Freud and Lacan make their stories of femininity turn on castration and lack, only Lacan gives the penis/phallus a linguistic turn. For Lacan, the phallus is not just a symbol, it is a *signifier*, and not just any signifier, but the transcendental signifier, by which he means that the phallus is the signifier of signification, the very signifier that enables meaning to arise in the first place. Because the phallus is at once the signifier of sexual difference and of meaning, Lacan's system is one in which femininity (a position that, as we have seen, Lacan expects most women to take up) can only ever be marginal to the symbolic. Per definition a woman's symbolic activities will always be called phallic. (*Any*

[31] Judith Butler sets out in the opposite direction. She considers that the phallus "both stands for the part, the organ, and is the imaginary transfiguration of that part" (1993, 79). To her, it follows that the phallus is an imaginary effect, which means that we are free to think of it as a transferable object of pleasure available to anyone, including lesbians. "Indeed, 'the' lesbian phallus is a fiction, but perhaps a theoretically useful one," Butler writes (1993, 85). Dean thinks that the phallus is a "giant red herring" (2000, 14), that is to say, a concept made obsolete by Lacan's later theory (particularly the theory of the *objet a*), so that all we need to do is to "move beyond interminable and increasingly sterile debates over the phallogocentric biases of Lacan's account of the phallus toward a more interesting '60s Lacan' of the object" (2000, 50).

[32] Let me stress again that I think we should distinguish between three different theories in Lacan and Freud, namely, between their theories of (1) the body, (2) the relationship between the body and sexed and gendered subjectivity (here we should further distinguish between the general understanding and the specific story being offered as an exemplification of that understanding), and (3) sexual difference.

symbolic activity is phallic.) A woman who does not conform to the Lacanian idea of femininity will be called masculine, just as a deviant man will be called feminine. There is powerful social normativity embedded in such language, a social normativity that became only too apparent in the French debates over *parité* (equal political representation for women) and *pacs* (pacts of civil solidarity for gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples) in the 1990s, in which many Lacan-inspired analysts took up extremely reactionary positions.[33]

From a feminist and historicizing point of view, Lacan's introduction of post-Saussurean linguistics into psychoanalysis was a mistake. Precisely because the relationship of femininity to the phallus is a purely symbolic equation for Lacan, patriarchy can never disappear. Lacan's theory of sexual difference is a watertight system, one that will always impose its own normative language of sexual difference on whatever people actually do. The historical *content* of the structure will change, but the structure itself will remain forever intact.[34] I may find that sixteenth-century notions of what counts as "feminine" are vastly different from our own, but the grid that produces the notion of "the feminine" in the first place remains unchanged. What I am objecting to, then, is that Lacanian theory is structured so as to formally *require* the "gendering" or "sexing" of a vast

[33] By far the best discussion of the connection between the *pacs* and parity debates is Anne F. Garréta's "Re-enchanting the Republic: *Pacs*, *Parité* and *Le symbolique*" (2001). Joan W. Scott's essay remains the most thoughtful essay on the parity debate (1998). Scott's essay was part of a special section on parity in the journal *differences*, which also contained interesting articles by Françoise Gaspard (1997) and a very interesting roundtable discussion (Rosanvallon, Collin, and Lipietz 1997). The French journal *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* published two special issues on parity, one in favor and one against (see *Nouvelles Questions* 1994 and 1995). The sociologist Eric Fassin's analysis (1999) of Mona Ozouf's successful and—to non-French feminists—deeply annoying *Women's Words: Essay on French Singularity* contains a wealth of information on French discussions of American feminism (Ozouf [1995] 1997), as well as an astute analysis of the sexual ideology at work in the parity debates in France. Anyone interested in seeing examples of the reactionary uses of Lacanian theory in the *parité* and *pacs* debates may consult the following: Anatrella 1998; Trigano 1998; Agacinski 1999; Anatrella 1999; Sausse 1999; Tincq 1999; Lamizet 2001. A welcome Lacanian exception to the rule of sexism and heterosexism is Tort 1999. Note that quotations from *Le Monde* without a page reference come from the World Wide Web. They can be found by searching for the name of the author on two different Web sites: *Le Monde*'s own Web archives (http://archives.lemonde.fr) and Lexis-Nexis Academic (http://web.lexis-nexis.com).

[34] In *Antigone's Claim* Butler also refers to the reactionary Lacanian positions in the controversy over the *pacs*. On this point her conclusion is similar to mine: "The [Lacanian] structure is purely formal, its defenders say, but note how its very formalism secures the structure against critical challenge. . . . [This] structure works to domesticate in advance any radical reformulation of kinship" (Butler 2000, 71).

array of human activities. Lacanian theory is a printing machine for gender labels. It is incumbent on those who believe that this is an excellent thing for feminism and for psychoanalysis to justify their belief.

Jouissance, femininity, and the "outside of language"

So far, I have only discussed Lacan's femininity theory such as it emerges in the late 1950s, when it is characterized by two things: its close reading of Freud and its introduction of post-Saussurean linguistics ("the phallus is a signifier"). Fifteen years later, in the seminar on femininity titled *Encore* (1972–73), Lacan takes the logic of his commitment to a post-Saussurean theory of language far beyond Freud (Lacan 1975, 1998).[35] In the 1958 "Phallus" essay femininity is still fundamentally a matter of castration and the attempt to mask that castration. In both texts the phallus is the transcendental signifier. But *Encore* casts femininity as inextricably linked with *jouissance*, understood as an experience or state beyond signification, "beyond the phallus." (For the purposes of this article I take "beyond the phallus," "beyond language," and "beyond signification" to be fairly equivalent expressions.)[36]

But what exactly is *jouissance*? We have all heard that *jouissance* can't be translated (I have certainly said so myself).[37] English-language texts have usually left *jouissance* in French. The result is that the concept comes to look particularly esoteric and mysterious. From a purely linguistic point of view, however, it is difficult to understand how a word like *jouissance* has gained this reputation. When I compared the entry for *jouir* in *Le petit Robert* to the entry for *enjoy* in the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, I found that both verbs can mean "to take pleasure," "to enjoy," "to possess," and "to have the use of." Many of the examples in the two dictionaries are exactly the same ("to enjoy a view," "to enjoy good health"). The major difference is that *enjoyment* no longer means "orgasm" in everyday English (although it once did), whereas that's exactly what *jouissance* means in everyday French. To any experienced translator this is hardly an insuperable challenge. Readily available translations abound: "enjoyment," "pleasure," "orgasm," and "orgasmic enjoyment"

[35] Lacan 1998 is the only complete English translation of *Encore*. Strangely, the translator makes no mention of Rose's excellent and widely used 1982 translation of important excerpts (see Mitchell and Rose 1982).

[36] As mentioned before, I have yet to find a serious investigation into the differences and similarities of the uses of these terms.

[37] In "Beyond the Phallus," Gallop provides a nice set of quotations claiming that *jouissance* is impossible to translate (see 1988, 119–20).

all have something going for them. Any remaining difficulties could be explained in a footnote, if it were felt to be necessary. All translation involves betrayal, no doubt, but when it comes to treachery, *jouissance* doesn't compare to Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*, Derrida's *différance*, and Hegel's *Aufhebung*. So why has it gained a reputation for being so particularly difficult to convey in English?[38]

Maybe it is not the word itself but what Lacan wants to do with it that makes *jouissance* seem untranslatable. Any conscientious translator would feel awkward writing sentences proclaiming that women's "enjoyment" or "orgasm" is "beyond the phallus," something that cannot be spoken, and so on. Surely this can't be all Lacan means by *jouissance*, she would think; he must have some kind of extraordinary phenomenon in mind, something that no ordinary English word could possibly convey. Better then to leave the word in French, so as to allow it to benefit from the mystery of the exotic and the unknown. My point is that *any* word said to denote something "beyond the phallus" would quickly come to seem untranslatable.

There is no doubt that the enjoyment in question is ascribed to women. If we were in doubt, the picture of Bernini's Saint Teresa on the front cover of the French edition of the twentieth seminar confirms the point. In *Encore*, Lacan writes of a "*jouissance* of the body which is . . . *beyond the phallus*." He also states that "there is a *jouissance* proper to her and of which she herself may know nothing, except that she experiences it—that much she does know. She knows it of course when it happens. It does not happen to all of them" ([1972–73 1982a, 145).

Female/feminine *jouissance* is beyond the phallus, outside language, and therefore potentially threatening to the cohesion of the symbolic/social order. But what exactly is it that escapes language and other social structures here? Are we being invited to believe that female orgasms, splendid as they are, belong to some mystic, extralinguistic, yet revolutionary realm to which male orgasms provide no access? And why is *jouissance* accorded this extraordinary status in the first place? Are female orgasms more extralinguistic than any other human experience? It would seem to be at least as difficult to capture in words the smell of a rose or the exact nuance of an experience of shame as it is to describe an orgasm. If one objects that *orgasm* is too pedestrian a word for *jouissance*, we have

[38] Gallop rightly thinks this has something to do with Roland Barthes's distinction between *plaisir* and *jouissance* in *Le plaisir du texte* (Gallop 1988, 120–21). For Barthes's French text, see 1973; for an English translation, see 1975. The date of Barthes's book is significant: he may well have attended Lacan's 1972–73 seminar.

to ask what Lacan means when he says that "we designate this *jouissance*, *vaginal*" (Lacan [1972–73] 1982a, 146). It would seem that he still clings to the old myth about the difference between vaginal (truly feminine) and clitoral (masculinized) orgasm. In short: what does such a concept of femininity tell us about women? Femininity here becomes a full-blown metaphysical concept, rightly linked by Lacan to mysticism.[39]

Femininity and *jouissance* are imagined to be "outside language," "beyond the phallus." (This they have in common with a whole cluster of Lacan-inspired concepts that have enjoyed quite a vogue over the past twenty or thirty years, namely, the "unspeakable," the "real," "the beyond," "trauma," "psychosis," etc.) There is a specific picture of language and meaning at work in such concepts. First of all, we are encouraged to imagine language as a kind of spatial territory, which can have an outside and an inside. This spatial imagery underpins the Lacanian theory of language and so comes to seem compulsory. But there are alternatives. We could, for example, think of language as a human practice that changes over time.

As soon as it has been established, the picture of the outside and inside of language (of the symbolic, of signification, etc.) gives rise to an urge to deconstruct the inside/outside opposition. This urge is the effect of the spatial picture of language. If that picture loses its hold on us, the deconstruction comes to seem less urgent. The belief in the beyond of discourse as well as the further belief that entities beyond discourse are always struggling and straining to disrupt it, always threatening to make our language nonsensical or meaningless, leads to an obsession with boundaries, borderlines, and limits, which will be proclaimed as the place where "representation" or "intelligibility" breaks down, where meaninglessness and chaos begin.[40]

But something else also emerges in this picture, namely, the extent to

[39] Rose summarizes the problems arising from Lacan's talk of women's orgasms as an ecstasy "beyond the phallus": "*Jouissance* is used . . . to refer to that moment of sexuality which is always in excess, something over and above the phallic term which is the mark of sexual identity. The question Lacan explicitly asks is that of woman's relation to *jouissance*. It is a question which can easily lapse into a mystification of woman as the site of truth. This is why Lacan's statements in *Encore*, on the one hand, have been accused of being complicit with the fantasy they try to expose, and, on the other, have led to attempts to take the 'otherness' of femininity even further, beyond the limits of language which still forms the basis of Lacan's account" (1982, 137).

[40] Wittgenstein's discussion of concepts with "blurred edges" is also relevant here, for it gives us reason to ask whether there are situations and concepts where boundaries and limits are not particularly useful metaphors (see 1968, sec. 71).

which Lacanians and other post-Saussurean theorists imagine that "language" means "representation." For if we ask how the spatial picture of language gets going, the answer seems to be that it arises when we think of language primarily as consisting in *nouns*. In post-Saussurean linguistics, nouns are *always* used as examples of language. Just think of all those primers in poststructuralism that first print tree for the signifier, then "tree" to illustrate the signified, and finally a drawing of a tree to explain what the referent is. That this is a horribly impoverished notion of what language is, is Wittgenstein's starting point for the whole of *Philosophical Investigations* ([1953] 1968). In section 1, he first quotes Augustine's account of how he learned to speak (by hearing adults say words and then pointing to the things represented by the words) and then goes on to comment:

> These words, it seems to me, give us a particular picture of the essence of human language. It is this: the individual words in language name objects—sentences are combinations of such names.—In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.
>
> Augustine does not speak of there being any difference between kinds of word. If you describe the learning of language in this way you are, I believe, thinking primarily of nouns like "table," "chair," "bread," and of people's names, and only secondarily of the names of certain actions and properties; and of the remaining kinds of word as something that will take care of itself. (Wittgenstein [1953] 1968, sec. 1)

The point, then, is not that Lacan and other post-Saussureans are wholly wrong. By definition, the referent of a noun is "outside language."[41] A tree is neither an acoustic pattern nor a black mark on a page, nor just a concept in our mind. In the language game called "representation" it makes sense to distinguish between an inside and an outside of language. But "representation" is only one of the games we can play with language. In section 25, Wittgenstein himself mentions "commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting" as things we do with language. Think also of crying for help, praying, confessing, bargaining, promising, predicting, thanking—the list is, if not endless, at least very long. The point is, simply, that

[41] The difference between structuralism and poststructuralism is that poststructuralists struggle to bring the referent inside language (I return to this below).

a theory of representation is not a theory of language. As Wittgenstein says, such a theory thinks primarily of nouns and a few other nounlike categories and leaves all the "remaining kinds of word as something that will take care of itself." In short, what would we draw to illustrate the working of words such as "help!" "albeit," or "haphazardly"? I do not imagine that this is a full-scale philosophical analysis of the question. My point is simply this: the Lacanian picture of language can no longer be taken for granted. Its very foundations require justification and defense.

But even within the terms of a theory of representation it is difficult to follow Lacan's mysticism about *jouissance*. If all referents are outside language, why would the *jouissance* of women be radically different from other nouns of sensation, such as the scent of a rose, the taste of a soup, the exact color of a car? I get the impression that in *Encore* Lacan is overcome by the idea that women's experience of orgasm is beyond the reach of his knowledge. But if this is so, then Lacan's quest for the unreachable *jouissance* of the woman is a version of skepticism. Again I find that I have reached the same ground as Cavell, who notes that in *Encore* Lacan "is casting his view of women as a creed or credo ('I believe'), as an article of faith in the existence and the difference of the woman's satisfaction" (1996, 102). This, Cavell adds, means that Lacan is "letting the brunt of conviction in existence, the desire of the skeptical state, be represented by the question of the woman's orgasm. . . . So skeptical grief would be represented for the man not directly by the question 'Were her children caused by me?' but by the double question 'Is her satisfaction real and is it caused by me?'" (1996, 102–3).[42]

On Cavell's reading, the question of the woman's *jouissance* is a question that arises specifically for men. His own highly pertinent examples are Othello's jealousy of Desdemona and Leontes's ferocious suspicion of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*.[43] Read in this way, *Encore* tells us something about the way skepticism can be gendered. It can tell us why some men find women deeply enigmatic. It also throws light on Freud's conviction that femininity is a riddle, whereas masculinity is not. But this way of taking *Encore* also tells us that insofar as Lacan tries to turn his own perception of women's secret enjoyment into a general, universally valid theory of sexual difference (and he does: *Encore* is the text that contains all those algebraic formulas for sexual difference), he is universalizing his own gendered experience.

Let me turn now to one other aspect of the claim that feminine *jouis-*

[42] I want to thank Larry Rhu for reminding me to reread this essay by Cavell.

[43] Cavell's essays on *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale* are collected in Cavell (1987) 2003.

sance is beyond the phallus. According to Lacanian theory, there is no meaning outside language, since meaning is an effect of the chain of signifiers in the symbolic order ruled by the phallic signifier. Nevertheless, the entities beyond the phallus are said to threaten to return to break up, subvert, or undermine the precarious stability of symbolic signification. We are, then, asked to believe that in the outer darkness beyond representation dwell the shadows of potentially meaningful entities: *jouissance*, femininity, and so forth. That they are there is proved by the fact that they exert pressure on ordinary, organized symbolic language, sometimes breaking it down entirely.

Given such a picture of femininity and the inside and outside of language, it may seem logical enough to argue, as Luce Irigaray once did, that women can't express themselves in ordinary language but must instead utter "contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason" ([1977] 1985, 29). There is a strong implication that the "language of reason" is to be imagined as male or masculine. In everyday life, however, there is no evidence that women actually are more contradictory than men. But this has no impact on theories of this kind, for femininity has now become a full-blown metaphysical concept.

There is another unformulated philosophical assumption here, one that James Conant succinctly defines (in a different context) as the "doctrine that there are certain aspects of reality that cannot be expressed in language but can nonetheless be conveyed through certain sorts of employment of language" (2000, 178). Cora Diamond puts the same assumption in slightly different terms: "There are some sentences which are nonsense but which would say something true if what they are an attempt to say could be said. The unsayability of what they attempt to say precludes its being said, but we can nevertheless grasp what they attempt to say" (2000, 158).[44] Irigaray's "contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason," fit precisely into this category. The idea is that such language, "mad from the standpoint of reason," tells us something about the nature of femininity, something that evaporates or disappears as soon as we try to rephrase it in the "language of reason."

But it is not self-evident that it makes sense to speak of meaningful yet

[44] This is Diamond's summary of Elizabeth Anscombe's point. In the same essay Diamond argues that Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* makes a powerful argument against the idea that there is a distinction to be drawn between "good nonsense and bad, [between] illuminating nonsense and dark murky muddle" (2000, 160). Whether this is a fair reading of the *Tractatus* or not is a question I do not feel equipped to answer. Diamond's other pathbreaking essays on Wittgenstein are collected in *The Realistic Spirit* (1995).

incomprehensible language in this way. If we postulate the existence of a kind of "mad language" in addition to the usual "rational language," we seem to end up with a version of the logic Wittgenstein refuses to recognize in the preface to the *Tractatus*:

> What can be said at all can be said clearly; and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence.
>
> Thus the aim of the book is to draw a limit to thought, or rather—not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts: for in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e. we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought).
>
> It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be drawn, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense [*einfach Unsinn*]. ([1922] 1994, 3)

If I understand this difficult passage correctly, Wittgenstein is saying that we can draw no limit to thought, for if we did, we should have to be able to think on both sides of the limit. But then the limit thought up by us would not be a limit; all such attempts are self-defeating. In other words: anything we can think is by definition thinkable. From this point of view, the poststructuralist attempt to "think the unthinkable" is meaningless.[45] The limit in question, then, is not a limit in thought but a limit in language ("the expression of thoughts"). Wittgenstein, however, does not have in mind a limit between language and some quasi-meaningful realm beyond language but between language that makes sense and language that does not. The passage denies that language that fails to make sense in the ordinary way actually still makes (extraordinary, hidden, metaphysical, profound) sense. Language is either meaningful or it isn't. We do not have to read this as a defense of a rationalistic ideal of lucidity and transparence of meaning.[46] It does not follow that Wittgenstein believes that it is always easy to find the sense of an utterance. Difficult language, language that requires us to use all the procedures available to

[45] I note here that the very first sentence of my own preface to *The Kristeva Reader* is "To think the unthinkable: from the outset this has been Kristeva's project" (Moi 1986, vi).

[46] Wittgenstein does not declare, either, that only easy or simple or uncomplicated language makes sense. I imagine that he might agree that it is not always easy to determine whether language makes sense or not. Few writers are as difficult to read as Wittgenstein himself. Yet his difficulty is caused by an attempt to get clear on difficult issues. It is not caused by any underlying belief in the ultimate meaningfulness, let alone the revolutionary power, of foggy and incoherent language.

human beings looking for the meaning of words, is not meaningless. In other words: "to make sense in the ordinary way" is not a subcategory of sense making.

On Wittgenstein's logic Irigaray's subcategory of language that sounds "mad from the standpoint of reason" loses its metaphysical status and becomes just one form of language use among others. Then it becomes open to analysis, not "from the standpoint of reason" but from the standpoint of the ordinary procedures we use to make sense of words.[47] It is quite possible that in some cultures women are trained to listen for certain kinds of sense that men are not trained to listen for. But this would be a fact about some women and some men in a certain place and time, not about femininity and reason as such. There would in particular be no assumption that the women's strategies for interpreting certain utterances would be more "mad from the standpoint of reason" than the men's. The advantage of this approach is that it avoids the reification of sexual difference and returns us from metaphysics to the ordinary. Cavell makes a similar point about the tendency to postulate sexually different knowledge in men and women, a tendency that we find in *Encore*:

> The reification, let me put it, of sexual difference is registered, in the case of knowledge, by finding the question of a difference in masculine and feminine knowing and then by turning it into a question of some fixed way women know that men do not know, and vice versa. Since in ordinary, nonmetaphysical exchanges we do not conceive there to be some fact one gender knows that the other does not know, any more than we conceive there to be some fact the skeptic knows that the ordinary human being does not know, the metaphysical exchanges concerning their differences are apt to

[47] To refuse the idea that there is something called femininity that gives rise to some special kind of "mad language" is self-evidently not to reject the idea of the unconscious. Ordinary procedures for making sense of words include the techniques used by analysts and literary critics. The analyst knows only too well that the analysand can use all kinds of language as forms of defense and resistance. She also knows how to listen for the whole speech act: the context, the silences, the tone, the affect, the body language. The fundamental assumption of the analyst and the literary critic is always that the language in question is the way it is, whether highly organized or utterly fragmented, for good reasons. To say that some or all of those reasons are unconscious is to say that the speaker or writer in question does not know, or does not want to know what they are. To listen for the unconscious is to listen to what we actually are saying, not to something else. Both Freud and Lacan take for granted that the unconscious shows up in language. The same is true for Kristeva's psychoanalytic linguistics, which is based on the assumption that desire is in language. Kristeva's first collection of essays in English was called, precisely, *Desire in Language* (1980).

> veer toward irony, a sense of incessant false position, as if one cannot know what difference a world of difference makes. (1996, 99)

If we come to doubt the post-Saussurean picture of language, some crucial concepts in Lacan's psychoanalytic theory no longer sound so compelling. (Clearly, the critique does not affect the less "linguistic" areas of Lacan's thought, particularly the theories concerning alienation, the mirror stage, transference and countertransference, and the subject presumed to know.) The post-Saussurean view of language shared by Lacan has been normal science, institutionalized *doxa*, in departments of language, literature, and cultural studies for thirty years now. To speak of "normal science" and *doxa* is to speak of principles and assumptions that have come to be taken for granted. I think it is time for a reconsideration of the linguistic foundations of poststructuralist theory. A serious encounter between poststructuralism and the so-called new Wittgensteinians would do much to clarify the philosophical premises of post-Saussurean (Lacanian and non-Lacanian) thought.[48]

Muddling the meaning of castration

So far, then, I have claimed that it is useless to set off in quest for a general psychoanalytic theory of femininity and that it is sexist to assume that femininity and sexual difference are synonyms. I have claimed that the phallus is not unrelated to the penis and that it is not true that the relationship between psychosexual subjectivity and bodies is arbitrary in Lacanian theory. I have also claimed that the concept of *jouissance* is sexist, metaphysical, and bound up with a theory of language that there are serious grounds to doubt. Now, finally, I shall look at the ways in which Lacan's concept of castration drifts between different meanings in ways that are "not always friendly to women," to echo an expression of Freud's.

The concept of castration got off to a bad start. Both Lacan and Freud define it in a way that makes it synonymous both with femininity and

[48] For some thoughts on what it would take to bring about an encounter between psychoanalysis and philosophy in general, see Cavell's essay "Psychoanalysis and Cinema: Moments of *Letter from an Unknown Woman*," reprinted as chap. 2 of *Contesting Tears* (1996). So far, the best attempts to bring about an encounter between poststructuralism and the new Wittgensteinian perspective are Cavell's critique of Derrida's reading of J. L. Austin (1994, 53–127) and Martin Stone's "Wittgenstein on Deconstruction" (2000, 83–117). The earliest and most accessible introduction to these questions remains Cavell's "The Politics of Interpretation" ([1982] 1988). For a challenging presentation of the new Wittgensteinians, see Crary and Read 2000.

with sexual difference. This makes castration complicit with the "othering" of women denounced by Beauvoir. That this is so becomes clear if we turn yet again to Lacan's 1958 essay on "The Meaning of the Phallus," which begins with a discussion of castration, namely, with a reference to Freud's 1937 essay "Analysis Terminable and Interminable."[49] This is the essay where Freud tries to explain why psychoanalytic treatment always fails to persuade a woman to give up her wish for a penis and why it also fails to persuade a man that "a passive attitude to men does not always signify castration" (1937, 252). In women, Freud calls this syndrome *penis envy*, and in men he labels it *masculine protest*: "We often have the impression that with the wish for a penis and the masculine protest we have penetrated through all the psychological strata and have reached bedrock, and that thus our activities are at an end. This is probably true, since, for the psychical field, the biological field does in fact play the part of the underlying bedrock. The repudiation of femininity can be nothing else than a biological fact, a part of the great riddle of sex" (1937, 252). At this point, a footnote informs us that "in other words, the 'masculine protest' is in fact nothing else than castration anxiety" (1937, 252–53). In both sexes, then, castration is violently opposed. The difference is that men fear castration, whereas women realize to their dismay that it has already happened. Repudiation of femininity is repudiation of castration, and this is a biologically based attitude in both sexes.

This interpretation will be controversial to some. Surely I haven't properly understood what castration means for Lacan. Castration, or the lack it opens up, is the entrance ticket to the symbolic order for everyone, a Lacanian would say. What is at stake here is the phallus, not the penis. In an attempt to explicate this doctrine, Mitchell once wrote: "But because human subjectivity cannot ultimately exist outside a division into one of the two sexes, then it is castration that finally comes to symbolize this split. The feminine comes to stand over the point of disappearance, the loss" (1986, 393). This admirably concise formulation claims that all human beings are marked by lack. To have to belong to only one sex is a traumatic loss, for both sexes.

So far, so good. But why is it *the feminine* that comes to stand over the point of sexual division? This only makes sense if we assume that the feminine means that which is castrated. But how do we get that idea?

[49] Lacan writes: "One of [Freud's] last articles turns on the irreducibility for any finite (*endliche*) analysis of the effects following from the castration complex in the masculine unconscious and from *penisneid* [penis envy] in the unconscious of the woman" (Lacan [1958] 1982a, 75).

Why is that which is castrated *defined* as feminine? Why not call it masculine, just to drive the point home, particularly if we are speaking of a position that has *nothing* to do with anatomical attributes, as so many Lacanians claim? The answer can only be that the feminine is called the feminine and described as castrated because, well, because women do not have a penis. (The relationship between body and subjectivity is not arbitrary, it is contingent.)

On this theory, women are doubly castrated, first by having to be only one sex (they are marked by sexual finitude, like everyone else—I'll return to this) and second by having to be the sex that doesn't have a penis. Lacanian terminology thus creates the following set of distinctions between symbol (left-hand side) and social phenomenon (right-hand side): phallus/penis; femininity/women; castration/castration. We are sternly admonished to keep the two sides apart, to understand that anyone can be feminine, that nobody actually has the phallus, and so on. In this list, however, castration must show up on both sides: this is where the cohesion of the symbolic and the social, the psychic and the anatomical surfaces.

The human and ideological effects of conflating castration with femininity are distressing. Moreover, the conflation could be avoided. For what Freud describes as the "repudiation of femininity" in both sexes is the human reluctance to accept the reality principle, to give up the dream of being all, of living forever, of narcissistic omnipotence, of living in a world that never frustrates our desires. Why not call this a reluctance to accept our human condition? What exactly has this got to do with femininity, let alone with women? Freud's own text shows that to call this general repudiation of lack "femininity" or "castration" is to place women in an impossible position: "The female's wish for a penis . . . is the source of outbreaks of severe depression in her, owing to an internal conviction that the analysis will be of no use and that nothing can be done to help her. And we can only agree that she is right, when we learn that her strongest motive in coming for treatment was the hope that, after all, she might still obtain a male organ, the lack of which was so painful to her" (1937, 252).

Given his conviction that to be a woman is to be castrated, Freud can only conclude that his depressed female patients are right to mourn the penis they will never have. For women who strive in vain to accept their so-called femininity, Freud counsels despair; to women who try to claw their way out of depression by doing something productive in the world, all he has to say is that they are phallic and suffer from penis envy. Lacan's theory does not lead to different conclusions. The problem, then, is that

the very language of castration and femininity imprisons women in their sexual difference and blocks their access to general existential categories.

If both men and women fear "castration," and castration turns out to mean "femininity," women cannot win. We need to find better and less sexist language for experiences shared by men and women. In one discussion of "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," Cavell translates Freud's castration into "victimization." This is a good example of how to avoid unnecessary gendering of general terms.[50]

In Freudian and Lacanian theory, *castration* is used in three different senses, namely, (1) to signify *lack* as a general human condition, (2) to signify *sexual difference* or *femininity*, and (3) to signify the discovery of our own "one-sexedness," that is to say, the discovery that we can only ever be one sex, in the sense that we can only ever have one body. (Desire remains as polymorphous and infinite as it ever was, but it is now confronted with the traumatic discovery of sexual finitude. I shall return to this.) Meaning 1 encourages us to believe that as soon as something can be called "lack" it can also be theorized as castration. It is difficult to understand why this is considered a sign of theoretical sophistication. Meaning 2 is the clearly sexist theory of femininity this article has been concerned with. Meaning 3, however, is just fine, but probably not very successfully conveyed by the word *castration*.

The indiscriminate use of *castration* encourages us to roam freely between the three meanings, collapsing them into each other as we please. The resulting confusion of categories is responsible for a distinctly (hetero)sexist "oversexualizing" or "overgendering" of human existence. It also has a tendency to generate a lot of empty language. Imagine a cultural theorist who observes something that resembles a cut (a blank screen? a black screen? a sudden hiatus? a pause?) and starts the theory machine. A cut evokes castration, which evokes lack, which conjures up the woman's sex, and from there we go to nothing, death, the real, the beyond, psychosis, madness—nothing can stop the machine. This is language on holiday.[51] Such language produces far more problems than it solves, and the biggest problem of all is that it projects a deeply sexist notion of sexual difference onto every human phenomenon.

What we need, then, is a psychoanalytic theory that truly seeks to understand the consequences of human "one-sexedness" without thinking in terms of either castration or femininity but also without denying the

[50] Cavell 1996, 111.

[51] Wittgenstein writes: "For philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*" (Wittgenstein 1968, sec. 38).

fact that male and female bodies are different. Many different kinds of analysts are producing such theories. This article is not trying to say that we don't need psychoanalysis; it is trying to say that psychoanalysis does not need a femininity theory.[52]

From castration to finitude

Here's a beginning of such a theory. McDougall has provided an interesting definition of psychoanalysis. She considers psychoanalysis to be a form of thought that attempts to understand the psychic consequences of three universal traumas: the fact that there are others, the fact of sexual difference, and the fact of death.[53] We note that only one of the three traumas has to do with the discovery of sex and sexual difference, yet Lacanian theory tends to use the concept of castration as a general term for all three traumas. As we have seen, this amounts to projecting an ideologically dubious notion of sexual difference on to the two other traumas, that is, to just about everything. *Castration* is simply too sexist a term to be useful as a general term for human limitation or lack. I want to propose that on this general level we speak of *finitude* instead. Following McDougall we can then understand psychoanalysis as a theory devoted to the exploration of the many different ways in which human beings deal with the traumatic discovery of their finitude, not as a theory that declares castration to be the key to human existence.

I take the concept of finitude from Cavell's analysis of skepticism in *The Claim of Reason*. "In the face of the skeptic's picture of intellectual limitedness," Cavell writes, "Wittgenstein proposes a picture of human finitude" ([1979] 1999, 431). But Cavell is not the only one to speak of human finitude, in the sense of our finiteness, our limitedness, the fact that we are not all, not everything. Chiland, a distinguished psychoanalyst of transsexuality, also speaks of finitude (1997, 246). From different perspectives then, philosophers such as Cavell and Wittgenstein and analysts such as Chiland and McDougall claim that the discovery of our separate, sexed, mortal existence is traumatic and that the human task par excellence is to try to come to terms with this discovery and this trauma. In a passage

[52] Many contemporary analysts write about psychic pain and pleasure without indulging in generalizations about sexual difference or femininity. Names such as Jonathan Lear, Adam Phillips, Christopher Bollas, Nina Coltart, and Joyce McDougall instantly come to mind, but there are so many others.

[53] I am elaborating on McDougall's brief formulation. She doesn't relate this brilliant thought to castration and sexual difference (see McDougall 1995, xv).

displaying striking affinities with psychoanalytic thought, Cavell writes: "If Rousseau can be said to have discovered the fact of childhood in human growth, and Wordsworth the loss of childhood, then romanticism generally may be said to have discovered the fact of adolescence, the task of wanting and choosing adulthood, along with the impossibility of this task. The necessity of the task is the choice of finitude, which for us (even after God) means the acknowledgment of the existence of finite others, which is to say, the choice of community, of autonomous moral existence" (1999, 464).

To this fundamental insight I want to add something. I want to suggest that we need to distinguish between three different aspects of finitude. This is partly inspired by McDougall's three traumas, partly by Chiland's explicit reference to our "ontological, sexed and temporal finitude" (1997, 247). On this view, to acknowledge finitude would mean to undertake three different tasks. First we need to acknowledge our spatial finitude, that is to say, our bodily, existential separation from others.[54] Then we need to acknowledge our sexual finitude, to understand that we can't be more than one sex. McDougall writes of the traumatic discovery of our "monosexuality" (1995, 6). Chiland writes of the transsexual's refusal of "sexed finitude" (1997, 247). Intersexed people, bisexuals, transsexuals, transvestites, and other transgendered people are neither more nor less sexually finite than anyone else. Our desires may be infinite; our bodies certainly are not.[55] The third task is to acknowledge the temporal finitude—the inevitable death—of those we love, and of ourselves. Of course, these tasks are beyond our powers. Only a saint could accomplish them all. Yet if we fail entirely in them, we will not be able to live.

For over a hundred years now psychoanalysis has patiently shown how difficult it is for human beings to accomplish the "task of adolescence," to choose finitude. This is the strength and glory of psychoanalytic thought. We cling to fantasies of merger with or eradication of the other, we want to be all sexes or none, we want immortality and omnipotence.

[54] In "Psychoanalysis and Cinema" Cavell notes that in his reading of E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Sand-Man," Freud explicitly denies the possibility that the question of "our knowledge of the existence of other minds" can be a source of the uncanny in the tale. Instead Freud insists that "the uncanny in Hoffmann's tale is directly attached to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes, and hence, given his earlier findings, to the castration complex" (Cavell 1996, 110). In this way Freud loses out on an opportunity to reflect on the wider consequences of human separation.

[55] To me, this is one way of glossing Freud's famous speculation that "something in the nature of the sexual instinct itself is unfavourable to the realization of complete satisfaction" (1912, 188–89).

His Majesty the Baby, as Freud calls this mightily egocentric creature, has no capacity for coexistence with others. Only those who have a sense of their own and other people's finitude can hope to create something like a human community, Cavell writes. Lacan would perhaps have said that "only those who have taken up a position in relation to the phallus can enter into the symbolic order." My point is that the same fundamental idea is at stake in these two formulations, but that Lacan's formulation is sexist (and philosophically unclear) in a way that Cavell's is not.

The realization of finitude is traumatic for everyone. Here it is crucial to disentangle relevant from irrelevant sexualization (or "genderization") of psychic issues. I agree with Freud and Lacan that there is probably sexuality in everything. But to say this is not to say that there is *sexually different* sexuality in everything, nor to say that everything can be *reduced to* sexuality. It is unlikely, to say the least, that all women experience finitude differently from all men in all its three aspects. To use *castration* or the more euphemistic *lack* as a general term for *finitude* is to impose a generalizing theory of sexual difference on all three traumas. Apart from ideological obfuscation, I fail to see what is achieved by doing that. Freud himself writes: "There is only one libido, which serves both the masculine and the feminine sexual function. To it itself we cannot assign any sex" (1937, 131). Freud here acknowledges, if only for a moment, that there may be phenomena, even intensely sexual phenomena, that have no sex (or gender, if one prefers). This moment of wonderful promise is instantly squashed, and Freud never returns to the possibility of human as opposed to sexed drives.[56]

To summarize and clarify: I have said that Lacanian and Freudian theory uses "castration" in three different senses: (1) general human lack, finitude; (2) specific feminine lack/sexual difference; and (3) discovery that we can only ever be one sex. In this picture, sexual difference tends to become the difference, the lack, that grounds all other differences. Fin-

[56] I say the moment of promise is squashed because Freud's sentence doesn't stop here. "To it itself we cannot assign any sex," he writes, "if, following the conventional equation of activity and masculinity, we are inclined to describe it as masculine, we must not forget that it also covers trends with a passive aim" (1933, 131). This comes only a few pages after his stern warning against equating femininity with passivity (see 1933, 115)! It is disheartening to note that Lacan converts Freud's half-hearted alignment of the libido with masculinity into a clear espousal of the primacy of the phallus: "One can glimpse the reason for a feature which has never been elucidated and which again gives a measure of the depth of Freud's intuition," he writes, "namely, why he advances the view that there is only one libido, *his text clearly indicating* that he conceives of it as masculine in nature" ([1958] 1982a, 85; my emphasis).

itude, on the other hand, is the traumatic discovery of three irreducible facts: (1) there are others; (2) there are others of a different sex than mine; and (3) there is death. In this scheme, finitude does not have to be figured as lack.[57] Sexual difference is a crucial element, but it is neither more nor less important than the two other aspects of finitude. In particular, it is not the foundation or paradigm of all kinds of finitude and difference. Yet the discovery of one's sexual finitude, one's "onesexedness," is a foundational human trauma and needs to be acknowledged. The big question is how to do this in ways that do not result in sexism and injustice. To eradicate awareness of sexual difference usually amounts to assimilating women to the male norm. To overemphasize sexual difference usually amounts to locking women up in their female difference. (My argument in this article has been that classical psychoanalytic femininity theory does both.) This scheme, moreover, gives us no grounds on which to go around "gendering the world" by projecting sexual difference on to all kinds of human qualities and activities.

Analysts and theorists ought to reserve the term *castration* for cases where people actually do fantasize, fear, worry about losing their sexual powers. (It makes no sense to call a sexually powerful woman castrated just because the theory implies that she must be.) They should also stop speaking of castration when what they have in mind is the most general sense of lack, for this amounts to imposing a sexist and sexualizing term on all of human existence.

For a philosopher of finitude, human psychic pain arises from the finitude of the human body. It is our bodies that are separate, sexed, and mortal. This is our human condition, and the task of finitude is to acknowledge it. No wonder that religions, vast philosophies, and innumerable works of art have arisen in the attempt. Psychoanalysis has always been a distinguished participant in the attempt to teach human beings to come to terms with finitude. But finitude is not the same thing as lack. *Must* the fact of finitude, the fact of being separate, sexed, and mortal, be figured as lack?

A final point: Lacanians will inevitably find that I have misunderstood and misinterpreted Lacan. (To some Lacanians the very fact of disagreeing with Lacan is evidence that one has failed to understand him.) They should bear in mind that my most fundamental critique of Lacan is external to

[57] The formulation owes something to a sentence in a brilliant exam paper written by Magdalena Ostas, a graduate student in the literature program at Duke University, in February 2003. Her sentence read: "The fact of finitude does not have to be expressed as lack." (The sentence occurred in a discussion of Cavell, Wittgenstein, and Derrida.)

Lacanianism and cannot be translated into Lacanian terms without significant distortion. Even if I have totally misunderstood what the phallus is, and quite mixed up the meaning of femininity, masculinity, and *jouissance*, that would not invalidate my major claims. I have claimed that Lacan's theory of sexual difference is a machine that churns out gender labels; that the spatial image of language that underpins Lacanian theory requires defense and justification; that Lacanian theory reduces language to representation and thus fails to have a theory of language; and that Lacan's gendered fascination with women's knowledge of sexual pleasure cannot yield a theory of women (or femininity). I have also claimed that the muddled and generalized use of the term *castration* is sexist and that the concept of *finitude* offers better and less sexist ways of theorizing the same aspects of human existence. Above all, I have claimed that psychoanalysis does not need a femininity theory, and that femininity theories inevitably turn men into the norm and women into the other. Anyone who wants to defend Freud or Lacan's femininity theories needs to show that these claims are wrong, misconceived, or irrelevant.

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