

MASQUERADE, FEMININITY, SEXE, AND THE LAC/ANALYST

By Clive Thomson and Doron Almagor (Toronto)

PART I: CLIVE THOMSON

Introduction

Seminar XX, Encore, has sometimes been seen as the *terminus ad quem* in Lacan's subversive thinking about femininity as it relates to topics such as sexual identity, jouissance, and love. It would probably be more accurate to say that Lacan was always interested, both before and after *Encore*, in "le féminin" and that he engaged, from the very beginning of his career (witness his doctoral thesis in 1931 on "Aimée," *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité*), in a permanent, albeit indirect dialogue with the feminist positions and ideas that were so much a part of the intellectual/political/social landscape of his times. Although the formulas of sexuation, presented in *Seminar XX*, provide us with a grid useful to our clinical work for diagnostic, heuristic and interpretive purposes, a perennial uncertainty remains in Lacan's writings about what it means to be a woman or a man. Lacan turned and returned to the question of "le féminin" throughout his career. Furthermore, it is clear that he was struck by the work of various women analysts, for example as Joan Rivière who, as early as 1929, studied the theme of sexual identity and concluded that the "stability" of one of her women patients "was not as flawless

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as it appeared" in her highly original article on "Womanliness as Masquerade" (p. 304).

In my contribution to this article, I propose a new way of understanding how and what Lacan learned from the women analysts whose work he studied. My hypothesis is that Lacan's ideas on "le féminin" and "la femme" appear to have been influenced, stimulated, and perhaps even enriched, by his reading of studies by Ella Sharpe, Lucia Tower, Hanna Segal, Ruth Mack Brunswick, Karen Horney, Melanie Klein, and others. I also raise some theoretical questions that are designed to provide a context for Doron Almagor's contribution, in PART TWO of this article, in which he analyzes clinical material and discusses Lacan's use of Joan Rivière's work —specifically, her notion of "masquerade."

In our earlier article, "Are All Analysts Women?" we explored several questions, the most important of which was: "What are the implications of Lacan's seeming alignment of feminine sexuation, if not women themselves, with an analytically desirable transference?" Our article contained a brief examination of a clinical vignette that allowed us to explore and illustrate one way of understanding Lacan's claim that women are freer in the realm of transference. We concluded our article with some questions that have continued to be the focus of our work, such as the following one: are there other ways of reading Lacan's statement that women are freer when it comes to transference/desire? We asked another question at the 2007 *English Speaking Seminar in Paris* conference about "woman as lover of the unconscious" —a question that was inspired by the following quotation from an article by Barbara Low to whom Lacan referred as a "remarkable" analyst. Barbara Low wrote: "We may not, as Freud has told us, take the role of prophet, saviour, or consoler to the patient, but may we not —indeed, must we not— become the lover of the material projected by the patient and make it our introjected 'good object'?" (p. 8). Barbara Low explicitly rejects the notion of the analyst as consoler of the patient —a position that is entirely consistent with Lacan's ideas on

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the analyst/analysand relationship. We remember how important the topic of love was in the thinking of Lacan: “[...] l’amour demande l’amour. Il ne cesse pas de le demander. [...] *Encore*, c’est le nom propre de cette faille d’où dans l’Autre part la demande d’amour” (*Encore*, p. 11) [Our translation]: [...] *love demands love. It never stops demanding it. [...] Encore is the proper name of that breach in the Other from whence comes the demand for love*); “Seul l’amour permet à la jouissance de condescendre au désir” (*Seminar X*, p. 209) [Our translation]: *Love alone allows jouissance to fall into/toward desire.*

We also kept our minds open to several valuable questions and comments that emerged in the discussion following our presentation at the 2007 conference. We were asked, for example, how we understood Lacan’s often ironic tone in his references to women and transference. Colette Soler made several comments that were helpful to us. She pointed out that Lacan, who could be both equivocal and malicious about women, is saying that women are not always able to situate themselves at the level of “pure desire,” which is ideally what the analyst should do. Soler qualified this statement by saying that desire, in her view, is not an ideal, but rather an “operator.” She added that Lacan thought that interesting analytic work can be done when the analyst who adopts the feminine position works with/within the transference. Soler remarked that the analyst who takes up the masculine position, in contrast to the analyst in the feminine position, needs an unconscious formation in order to make present the link with the Other and that the establishment of the link with the Other is easier for the woman analyst. Soler concluded her comments with a reference to the analyst as a “semblant d’objet” and this idea has played a key role in our work over the past year or so. Colette affirmed that: “The analyst has to be able to put himself/herself ‘into parentheses’ in the analytic situation. Lacan said later in his career that the position of the analyst is that of a ‘semblant d’objet.’”

Part One: Lacan's "Mocking" Tone?

The early 1970s are a period in Lacan's work when he makes many references to women analysts, such as the following particularly interesting one in *L'Étourdit*, published in *Scilicet* in 1973:

Indiquons seulement que les femmes ici nommées, y firent appel — c'est leur penchant dans le discours — de l'inconscient à la voix du corps, comme si justement ce n'était pas de l'inconscient que le corps prenait voix. Il est curieux de constater, intacte dans le discours analytique, la démesure qu'il y a entre l'autorité dont les femmes font effet et le léger des solutions dont cet effet se produit. (p. 20.)

[My translation]: *Let us indicate that the women named here, have evoked it [Lacan is referring to the debate about the absence of the sexual relation] —it is their tendency in discourse— saying that the body speaks from/through the unconscious, as if, precisely, it was not from/through the unconscious that the body speaks. It is curious to note —and this is a given in analytic discourse— the disproportion between the authority actually enjoyed by women and the slightness of the solutions that results from their authority.*

In *Ce que Lacan disait des femmes*, Soler comments on this quotation from *L'Étourdit* in the following way: "Et Lacan de se moquer de la disproportion entre le poids de leur voix dans la psychanalyse et le «léger des solutions» produites" (p. 265). [Our translation]: *And Lacan goes on to mock the disproportion between the weight of their voices in psychoanalysis and the slightness of the solutions they have produced.*

Soler reads Lacan's tone as mocking. In contrast, I read the same statement in *L'Étourdit* not as a mocking one, but rather as both a mild form of praise for women analysts and as an implied criticism of male analysts who have been unable to give women analysts their proper due. Is it possible that those who take/put on the feminine position read Lacan with a difference? How can we talk about the difference in the ways readers in the feminine and masculine positions approach Lacan's

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texts? I speculate that this question is related to Lacan's position that analysts working within a feminine structure have greater freedom when it comes to desire.

It is clear that Lacan admires women analysts like Lucia Tower but he is also very critical of the work and clinical interventions of others, such as Ida Macalpine (see Lacan's criticism of Macalpine's treatment of the Schreiber case), Phyllis Greenacre, and Lampl de Groot (see Lacan's sarcastic comments on Greenacre and Lampl de Groot in *Seminar X*). He has both critical and positive reactions to the work of some other analysts, such as Melanie Klein, Ella Sharpe, Karen Horney, Helen Deutsch, and Margaret Little.

In *Seminar X* (in the lecture that took place on March 20, 1963), Lacan devotes a relatively sustained and non-ironic commentary to Margaret Little's 1957 article, "The Analyst's Total Response to the Needs of the Patient." Lacan says that Little's work is both "original and problematic" (p.167) and he registers his general agreement with Little's suggestions about methods for treating psychotic patients. He attenuates his praise for the way Little handles her patient by saying that he does not recommend her two interventions as a model to be followed, but he does add that, because her interventions are examples of the way the cut functions, the interventions are what made the analysis move in new directions. At the end of his discussion of Little's case, Lacan claims that women are superior when it comes to *jouissance*—because their connection/link with the knot of desire is looser. This means a simplified relation with the desire of the Other, in the sense that the analyst in the feminine position does not hold to the Other as essentially as does the analyst in the masculine position. Woman has more freedom when it comes to *transference* (p. 214-215, French edition; p. 164-165, English edition). The difference, for man, is explained by Lacan as follows:

Le manque, le signe *moins* dont est marquée la fonction phallique pour l'homme et qui fait que sa liaison à l'objet doit passer par la négativation du phallus et le complexe de

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castration, le statut du (-phi) au centre du désir de l'homme, voilà qui n'est pas pour la femme un noeud nécessaire (p. 214.)

[Our translation]: *This lack, this minus sign, with which the phallic function is marked for man and which means that for him his liaison to the object has to pass by this negativizing of the phallus and the castration complex, the status of the (-phi) at the centre of man's desire, this is not a necessary knot for woman.*

Lacan's attitude toward Lucia Tower in *Seminar X* is similar to his attitude toward Margaret Little. He has positive comments on the outcome of Tower's treatment of her patient, but he disagrees with Tower's account of the analytic process. Lacan rejects Tower's terminology ("counter-transference") and substitutes a new terminology ("the desire of the analyst") and a different conceptual framework to account for what happened in Tower's consulting room. Tower was correct, according to Lacan, to sustain a search, even though she was searching for the wrong thing — i. e., her own desire. She was in fact sustaining the search for "objet *a*" and it was her desire as a woman analyst that allowed this to happen. Hence, the analysis shifted direction. What allowed the analysis to shift direction was the way Tower re-oriented her relationship to her patient's desire, and thus, as Lacan says, "elle peut garder ses distances" (p. 228): [Our translation] "*she can keep her distance.*" We can speculate that if Lacan had reread Tower's article in the 1970s, when his thinking about the analyst's desire had evolved, he might have said that Tower's case changed course because she consented to lend herself to the function/place of the semblant d'objet.

If we restate, using Barbara Low's turn of phrase, the lesson that we can learn from Tower and Little's clinical material and Lacan's comments on it, perhaps women analysts' "love" for their patients' unconscious is what is most striking.

Lacan's attitude to the work of women analysts in the 1960s is best described, in my view, as dialogic. He gives both Little and Tower "a fair hearing" in the way he revoices their voices and allows their voices to be heard. But he does more than this. The women analysts'

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work becomes grist for Lacan's "theory mill." He works through their clinical material in order to reinvent his theories and push them in radically new directions.

In *Seminar XVIII* and *Seminar XX*, Lacan revises and amplifies considerably his earlier theories about women, love, jouissance, and sexuation. In *Seminar XVIII*, for example, we read: "[...] la femme a une très grande liberté à l'endroit du semblant" (p.35) [Our translation]: "[...] woman has a very great freedom with regard to the semblant." He goes on to make the following claim:

En revanche, nul autre que la femme, car c'est en cela qu'elle est l'Autre, ne sait mieux ce qui de la jouissance est semblant. C'est parce qu'il est à l'intersection de ces deux jouissances que l'homme subit au maximum le malaise de ce rapport qu'on désigne comme sexuel. Comme disait l'autre, ces plaisirs qu'on appelle physiques.

[My translation]: *On the other hand, no one other than woman, because in this regard she, as the Other, knows better what the semblant has to do with jouissance. It is because man is at the intersection of these two jouissances that he has to deal with the maximum discomfort in this relation that we call sexual. As someone once said, these pleasures that we call physical.*

In Part Two of our article, Doron Almagor looks at the notion of masquerade in Joan Rivière's work and at how this notion differs from Lacan's idea of the semblant. He also discusses a clinical vignette in light of these notions.

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PART II: DORON ALMAGOR

*Lacan and Rivière: On a Relationship
That Might Not Be a Semblant*

Preface

For this English speaking conference of the *Formations Cliniques du Champ Lacanien*, I will continue the Franco/English thesis Clive has begun by suggesting a relationship between the work of Jacques Lacan, and the English analyst, Joan Rivière. First, I will begin by examining Joan Rivière's work, and more specifically her paper on feminine masquerade. Secondly, I will explore Lacan's development of Rivière's concept of masquerade into that of the semblant, while noting its significant divergences. I will then use a vignette from a clinical case to illustrate the differences and similarities between Rivière and Lacan's conceptualization of the concepts of feminine masquerade and Semblant. I propose that these contrasts aid us in responding to substantive clinical questions that concern the effects of jouissance on the differently sexuated structures.

Joan Rivière and Masquerade

Joan Rivière is an intriguing figure in the history of psychoanalysis. A member of the first generation of English analysts, she pioneered translating Freud into English, and was Freud's preferred translator. She was analyzed by both Ernst Jones and Freud, and indeed, examination of historical records and letters between herself, Jones, and Freud, is practically conclusive in demonstrating that the case in question in her famous paper, the very one on which I will further elaborate, is actually that of herself and her own analyses with Jones and Freud.

Rivière is best known for her seminal 1929 paper, *Womanliness as a Masquerade*, which introduces the term *feminine masquerade* into the psychoanalytic canon, at least in name. Rivière's paper is most striking. It is in many ways extremely innovative: Rivière probes the conflict women experienced at the beginning of the last century with their

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professional achievements —a problem that remains contemporary nearly 100 years later. In other ways, from a Lacanian position, the pro-offered interpretations of paper are banal and simplistic. I propose that although Rivière does attempt to elaborate the structure that constitutes the symptom of the feminine masquerade, she concludes her argument within the deadlock of penis envy and phallic jouissance. Lacan's formulation and usage of Rivière's concept, by adapting it to his idea of the semblant, takes us beyond this impasse, positioning feminine jouissance within the field of the Other jouissance.

The Case of Joan Rivière

Let us examine the case in question. Rivière's patient is a highly successful professional woman, respected and held in esteem by her colleagues, and seemingly confident in her public appearances. Rivière formulates this appearance as a façade and writes:

Certain reactions in her life showed, however, that her stability was not as flawless as it appeared; one of these will illustrate my theme. She was an American woman engaged in work of a propagandist nature, which consisted principally in speaking and writing. All her life a certain degree of anxiety, sometimes very severe, was experienced after every public performance, such as speaking to an audience. In spite of her unquestionable success and ability, both intellectual and practical, and her capacity for managing an audience and dealing with discussions, etc., she would be excited and apprehensive all night after, with misgivings whether she had done anything inappropriate, and obsessed by a need for reassurance. This need for reassurance led her compulsively on any such occasion to seek some attention or complimentary notice from a man or men at the close of the proceedings in which she had taken... There were clearly two types of reassurance sought from these father-figures: first, direct reassurance of the nature of compliments about her performance; secondly, and more important, indirect reassurance of the nature of sexual attentions from these men. (p. 303)

What does Rivière make of these symptoms? Rivière takes this

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opportunity to further her response as she posits in the paper, (treading in Freud's own waters), "what is the essential nature of fully-developed femininity?" and she even further employs Freud's own terminology and writes "What is das ewig Weibliche?" (p.312) or "*What is the essential woman?*"

How does she answer this? Rivière posits that women wish for a masculinity signified by the phallus and designated essentially as a penis. Phallic activity, such as public speaking, causes a retreat behind a *mask* of femininity in order to ward off the anticipated male reprisal. Essentially, after stealing the father's penis, the girl is fearful of reprisal. To placate the father and her anxiety, she *plays* at not having it. Therein lies the masquerade. Rivière labels this as a defense mechanism. Kleinian in nature, this thesis implies paranoid mechanisms of ego defense, which is where the level of this analysis rests its case. (Palomera, 1992.)

Essentially, Rivière's analysis, points to the woman hiding that which she has or wishes to have. It is not about being. Woman's helplessness may be a mask, but she remains defined by the phallus/penis.

Lacan on Masquerade

Lacan further explains the term "masquerade," commuting it from the bounds of paranoid defense, thus elevating it to that of a structural trait of femininity and its supplementary jouissance. Lacan proposes that the mask is not a defense mechanism; for him it is the identification with the Other's desire. It is in 1958, in "The Signification of the Phallus," that Lacan cedes importance to the concept of masquerade, as the method by which a woman lends herself to a man's desire. To quote Lacan, "as paradoxical as this formulation may seem, in order to be the phallus—that is, the signifier of the Other's desire—a woman rejects an essential part of femininity, namely, all its attributes, in the masquerade. It is for that which she is not that she wishes to be desired as well as loved" (*Écrits*, 694/290). This masquerade, a feminine seeming or "para-being" [*par-être*] (*Seminar XX*, p.44), transforms the "not having the phallus" into a "being the phallus." Lacan writes

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that, “like a veil dissimulating the feminine subject’s deprivation, the phallic masquerade also brings about a “veiling effect” (*Écrits*, 732/94) in relation to the feminine unconscious Other. While for Rivière the phallus signifies woman’s desire, for Lacan it is paradoxically just a transparent piece of cloth, a veil, that reveals her susceptibility and makes her the phallus, the *objet petit a* of man’s desire.

We can now read Rivière’s case with Lacan. Rivière’s patient would be excited and apprehensive all night after —“with misgivings to whether she had done anything inappropriate, and obsessed by a need for reassurance.” As Palomera notes, for Lacan, the disguise combines the object and phallic function and gives phallic value to the object of submission. Palomera notes that this is the point at which Lacan is against Rivière and states that for Lacan the masquerade is “not a defense but a true offense of the drive. The pantomime —as a symptom —not a defense— because it restores the phallic value before masculinity— it is the price she must pay to make the phallus circulate —and to do so— she has to offer herself to this circulation.”

Application of the Concept of Semblant to a Clinical Case

I will now present a small fragment of a case, a beating fantasy of a patient. Some of you here today will be already familiar with this vignette extracted from the longer case presentation given at the APW Conference on Love, in Philadelphia last year. For today’s purposes, I will present only a fraction of the material presented in Philadelphia, a vignette per se that includes a beating fantasy.

As in Joan Rivière’s case, my patient was also a highly successful professional woman. In work situations she initially presents herself as confident and highly competent, however behind the scenes was highly anxious and sought compulsive reassurances from men, both professionally and sexually. To my mind, the parallel which connects both cases is superficial, but ultimately did speak to structural similarities.

In this case history, at the age of 12-13 the patient’s breasts were fondled by her music teacher. She had “worshipped” him until that time, and enjoyed their private lessons. She was praised by him for her

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musical talents, and was told she had a possible professional future. When he fondled her breasts, she laughed at him, saying, "you are a stupid and silly old man." She then threatened to tell her parents. At this point he stopped and begged her forgiveness and silence. She did not tell her parents, but did not return to see him nor continue with her music lessons, claiming that she had lost interest in music, and gave it up.

Masturbation Fantasy

Following the incident with her music teacher, she began experiencing a masturbation fantasy that remained thematically stable throughout her life and one which she frequently evoked in fantasy to achieve orgasm. This is the masturbation fantasy:

I am usually in a room or sometimes outside. The man I have in mind is always older, but not too old. He is always very large and sometimes or usually heavyset. In my mind he is usually someone very famous and wealthy and I am not but I have attracted his attention. I tell him I don't want him but really I do. I don't want to be too easy because then he wouldn't want me so I play hard to get. But in the fantasy sometimes he withdraws and then I get worried I overplayed being hard to get. Then I get sad and tearful which starts getting me excited. We play a kind of cat and mouse game and at some point the tension is too much to bear. So I give up and let myself be caught. When he does catch me he starts beating me. Not lightly but severely. With a belt. But not too severely. I am not sure if getting sad or getting hurt is what excites me the most. It is sick.

Interpretation of Beating Fantasy by Rivière

How would Rivière have interpreted this particular sequence of sexual encounter and subsequent fantasy? Indeed what would Rivière's descendants say today? While there is no Rivierian school in the world today, Rivière's paper has become an oft-quoted, even foundational paper in the schools of both Kleinian and Relational Psychoanalysis that have been influenced by feminist theory. One could thus understand

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the vignette: The patient, in her forceful and threatening rejection of the music teacher, achieved a phallic victory. Having done so, it is now an agent-cause of anxiety. Will the music teacher retaliate for her possession of the imaginary phallus? To compensate, and render herself less of a target, she drops piano lessons altogether, letting go of the phallus of a musical talent if not a career. Later in life, this repeats itself in the musical rhythm of her working life; she alternates from being a highly talented professional to a hyper feminine and helpless victim in her relationships with men. The semblant, the feminine masquerade, thus masks the Phallus in defense against anxiety or preemptively defends against retaliation. The beating fantasy functions as a repetitive attempt at mastery of this conflict. In the fantasy, the man in question is clearly a paternal figure who possesses the phallus. The masochistic fantasy perpetuates a relationship of ownership of this phallus through a game of "cat and mouse." Here, it is not a question of the Other jouissance but that of the jouissance of the Other. One could view this thus as a perverse strategy, where the patient wishes to have the imaginary phallus and also decline symbolic castration. She is only *playing* at not having the imaginary phallus, while underneath believing she possesses it.

I do not read the descendants of Rivière in the Kleinian or Relational schools, or within feminist theory, as diverging from this interpretation significantly. They may critique Rivière's belief that femininity and the mask of hyper-femininity are one and the same. They might introduce cultural factors. They might emphasize the girl's relationship with the mother and eliminate the father altogether. All of these might be valid points although I would argue ultimately baseless in that their gender theories do not employ Lacan's structuring of sexuation as an effect of dialectical logic that works through the registers of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real. But regardless of these finer points of validity, *a priori*, they maintain that the conflict women have with success is essentially a phallic one, relating to conflicts with aggression and power, and leading to either thwarted or fulfilled phallic jouissance. In this manner, although they emphasize the maternal, they maintain

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a discourse of the imaginary phallus. These discourses, as with our modern societal discourse place no constructive value in lack.

Interpretation of Beating Fantasy by Lacan

What was the patient's own interpretation of this sequence? I can only provide the conclusions she came to at the end of a lengthy analysis. In the assumption of her unconscious knowledge, the patient approached a delineation of a jouissance of loss. As a symptom, this jouissance became less destructive in character over the course of the analysis, but, remained based in loss, in a lack that expressed itself as a Mask: a hyper-feminine helplessness in an otherwise "objectively" very capable person.

The sequence of event and fantasy could be interpreted through these steps:

- She says no to the music teacher and threatens retaliation. In this confrontation with an aggressive sexual predator she defends herself through the possession of an imaginary phallus.
- Apres-coup, a complex and reciprocal relationship is established between this event and earlier contingent encounters with jouissance.
- As the earlier encounters with jouissance had already placed her on the feminine side of sexualization, she enters this side also in this encounter.
- Thus, in the reciprocal resignification of the event, the phallus she possessed vis-à-vis the piano teacher collapses, and performs as a veiling function, accentuating her as a phallus for the music teacher's desire. This is also signified by the Other jouissance of giving up and dropping her musical talent. Anxiety here is not as in Rivière's interpretation at the level of retaliation, but rather the anxiety of taking a stand against the teacher and that of making a name for herself in music: that is in entering the limits and dangers of phallic jouissance. This gives further momentum in a movement to the side of the Other jouissance.
- Because of the particular nature of this and other encounters with jouissance, the price she must pay to circulate the phallus by

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offering herself as the phallus is particularly extreme and violent, and has the appearance of masochism.

- This violence is encapsulated in the beating fantasy. But in essence, it was discovered, through the work of the analysis, including the dream work that I presented in Philadelphia, that the nodal point of jouissance in the fantasy was in the submission of the “giving up.”

- This “giving up” was hence the semblant, *but also* an expression of the Other jouissance.

- The delineation of the semblant and its equivalencies to the Other jouissance, allowed her some freedom in setting the boundaries of the semblant in her life.

The semblant and the Other jouissance were found in this clinical example to be two sides of the same coin, or more appropriately, Mobius strip. Can we say this clinical example validates Lacan's development of the concept of semblant? I will conclude by saying that this clinical example shows how the Lacanian clinic uses the semblant to read the opacity of the jouissance and how the working through of the dialectic between semblant and jouissance allows the patient to name the boundaries of the Semblance/Jouissance dyad. I believe this case illustrates this process well and makes use of Lacan's concept of the semblant. The contrasts between Joan Rivière's concept of semblant and Lacan's appropriations of it, can further help us in delineating this process.

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DU CHAMP LACANIEN

Sexual Identity and the Unconscious

with Seminar *Encore* as main reference

English-Speaking Seminar in Paris
Thursday, Friday and Saturday June 28, 29, and 30, 2007

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this volume gathers together the papers presented at the fourth English language seminar of the Lacanian Field in Paris. The first volume was about "The Clinic of Transference," the second one was on "The Ethics of the Psychoanalytic Treatment," and the third one was on "Anxiety, the Affect of the Real." These volumes have already been published.

This seminar was held on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, June 25, 26 and 27, 2009, and was organized by the research group "Lacan in English." In June 2009, this group, chaired by Colette Soler, included Sol Aparicio, Patricia Dahan, Luis Izcovich, and Radu Turcanu.

The seminar brought together psychoanalysts from various countries (France, Australia, England, Ireland, Israel, Slovenia, Canada, United States), for six half-days; they held discussions with English speaking colleagues from the School of Psychoanalysis of the Lacanian Field.

We are printing the texts that were presented at the Seminar. We have not sought to use a single version of the English language for all the texts; they are therefore reproduced in the forms chosen by the authors.

We are very sorry not to be able to publish Yehuda Israely's speech on "The Logic and Topology of the Other Jouissance" in this volume as we did not receive his text in time.

THEME PRESENTATION

SEXUAL IDENTITY AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

*Colette Soler (January 11, 2009),
translated by Radu Turcanu*

When we refer to the subject of the unconscious as revised by Lacan, we say that it has no identity, since it is always a “twosome,” divided between two signifiers. More generally speaking, the unconscious is not fit to establish an identity, were it sexual, due to the fact that it is structured like a language.

Moreover, the uncertainty as to being a man or being a woman is a fact: the subject is troubled and doubts because it wants to be sure that it actually has the sex corresponding to its anatomy — unless a delusional certitude makes it raise objections as to this anatomy.

The sexual act itself is not a remedy, since, according to the synopsis of the seminar “The Logic of Fantasy”: “there is no sexual act, meaning: one that could categorically assert for the subject its certitude of being of that particular sex.”

Indeed, the unconscious is also the remedy: with respect to the sexuated couple, the signifier that is unique for the two sexes, the phallus, opens the dialectic between being or having the phallus, which supplants the flaw with respect to identity. This is not without consequences, since the *verdrangung* of the phallus as signifier of desire has as effect the projection of the typical manifestations of the sexes at the level of the pure semblant: feminine masquerade and virile parade come on stage in this “comedy of the sexes” in which the ideals of

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the Other are the leading lights, yet unable to answer to the question concerning sexual identity.

That was Lacan's major thesis when he followed in Freud's footsteps.

The formulas of sexuation, which appear for the first time in "L'Étourdit" in 1972 and are taken up again in *Encore*, go beyond that, yet without invalidating what preceded them. They lay the foundations of a possible definition of a sexual identity that would not be one based on the semblant, but that should be determined in terms of jouissance: the all-phallic determines the side of the man, the not-all phallic determines the side of the woman. This partition into the two "halves" has nothing to do with the anatomy, and does not imply the object choice, homo or heterosexual. "They make their own choice," "it is up to them," "they're the only ones responsible for sexual being." Thus, we can find everything on the side of the all-phallic: the heteros, the Montherlant type homos in line with the ethics of the bachelor, hysterics beyond sexes, and even some mystical figures such as Angelus Silesius. All this allows us to say that sexual identity remains independent with respect to the object choice, homo or hetero. This thesis has, indeed, tremendous social implications.

There is one more question to be raised here, born of the latest developments in the *Encore* seminar. The knowledge of *lalangue* is made of "ones" that are outside the chain, and that is therefore not structured like a language. Nevertheless, it marks the substance body following the first contingent encounters of jouissance. Does this knowledge then have sexuated versions that could impact this partition?

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