

SEXUAL DIFFERENCE: *ENCORE, YET AGAIN*

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This paper looks at the question of 'sexual difference' within psychology and considers what Lacan does with this question. Thereafter it looks at what the perspective of 'critical psychology' can do with Lacan's understanding of sexual difference. In this sense, this paper is a defense (focusing on the promise) and a critique (focusing on the problem) of Lacan. Section I of the paper is an extension of the Lacanian take on sexual difference into the space of psychology, a space driven hitherto by either the biological, or the rather conservative understanding of sexual difference. Section II tries to show how Lacan, in spite of some brilliant insights - insights that give to psychology a distinct spin - could not exit the game, for he is foiled again and again by the ferocious two-fisted red-blooded Phallus (Spivak, 1994: 65). However, to look at the question of sexual difference, one first needs to look at the question of the 'subject' in general, and the 'sexed subject' in particular; and it is on the question of the subject that psychology and Lacanian psychoanalysis would have to part ways, for there is a "fundamental incompatibility between Lacan's work and psychological views of the individual subject" (Parker, 2003: 95-115). Over to Ian Parker...

Section I:

What Lacan does with the question of sexual difference within Psychology?

This section takes off from Parker's critical insight into the *relationship* between Lacanian psychoanalysis and psychology; perhaps there is no such thing as a relationship between Lacanian psychoanalysis and psychology. For there is a "fundamental incompatibility"; hence "attempts to assimilate the two traditions are misconceived". With respect to the question of the subject, in "*On the Subject Who is Finally in Question*", Lacan brings into the field of psychology something *uncanny*. What follows is not just a "subversion of the subject", or a fracturing of the subject (which in other words is a pluralizing of subject positions as against one given subject position), but an understanding of the subject question beyond the 'Reality-Rationality-Pleasure Principle', beyond what gets written in an apparent and transparent way on the surface sheet of the 'Mystic Writing Pad'. It is an understanding premised on the complex web of legibility-illegibility residing in the wax slab underneath; it is premised on what gets written and overwritten on the wax slab, producing palimpsests, producing unfamiliar (manus)scripts (Dhar, 2008, 2009). For Lacan,

It is in the specific reality of *interpersonal relations* that a psychology can define its own object and its method of investigation. The concepts

implied by this object and this method are not subjective, but *relativistic*. (2006: 71)

One such interpersonal and relativistic site is the site of therapy or analysis – the site of the therapist-client or the analyst-analysand. Lacan's interventions into this interpersonal and relativistic site take psychology (and its more aggressive cohort – psychiatry – focused first on the reduction of non-reason *to* unreason and then a particular engagement with unreason premised on the mad's imagined and anticipated threat to self or others) in and of the West beyond control, surveillance and normativization-related functions. More specifically, it takes psychology beyond the 'normal-and-the-pathological' as the defining dyad of approaching the question of mental dis-ease; such that the diagnostic categories made global through the American Psychiatric Association do not remain sacrosanct (Foucault, 2003: 291). One begins to think models of relationality beyond the dyad 'cure-conformity'. Such that normativities, deviations from them, and return to them (the conversion of the ego-dystonic to the ego-syntonic) are not the limited number of options available to the clinical setting. Such that there is no 'normal/straight stick', against which 'pathological/bent/queer sticks' are measured. Psychopathology as a sub-discipline within psychology thus becomes subject to the deconstructive (Parker et al. 1995). For Lacan all sticks are under water; all sticks are 'bent' in myriad ways. All sticks have to them an Imaginary, a Symbolic and a Real face(t). All sticks are marked by conscious commitments and unconscious dispositions; all sticks remain menaced by the two layered-ness of the Mystic Writing Pad – two layered-ness marked by a *perceptually available innocence and legibility* on the surface layer and an *infinite resource of intricate and uncanny traces* on the deeper layer (Derrida, 1978: 226). In the process, Lacan inaugurates in the sciences of the mind an attention to and an understanding of *intersubjectivity* (as against the 'first-person' and 'third-person' approaches to a science of the mind) through in turn 'an attention *to* language', language as not just representing reality, "but rather the subject" (Borch-Jacobson, 1992: 85). Language is constituted as not just setting up a relation between the *word* (word-presentation) and the *world* (thing-presentation), but as setting up a relation between and among subjects. Lacan inaugurates an attention to the "relation between the signifier and the subject", to the "essentially linguistic structure" that underlies *even* "hallucinatory texts" (Lacan, 2006: 449)¹. He inaugurates at about the same time an attention to *undisclosed* language, at language that has been *dimmed over*, that has been *occluded*, that remains *buried*, at *covered up* language, and also at scripts that are apparently illegible (Lacan, 2006: 364; Mitchell, 2000: 6). Singed by a Lacanian mindset, psychology comes to have in addition to cure-related functions, both care and truth related functions; and truth related functions inaugurate in psychology an attention to the old Socratic question "in what way should one live?" (Lear, 1999).

¹ "Whether it wishes to be an agent of healing, training, or sounding the depths, psychoanalysis has but one medium: the patient's speech. The obviousness of this fact is no excuse for ignoring it" (Lacan, 2006: 206).

The other relativistic site for Lacan is the site of sexual difference. The two of sexual difference is a metaphor for the two of the analytic situation, and the two of the analytic situation is a metaphor for the sexed couple (that is *not* necessarily hetero-sexed). Both point to the limits of love and knowledge; both point to the limits of the love of knowledge (the limits of objectivity) and the limits of the knowledge of love (the limits of transference).²

To understand the two of sexual difference, we begin with one of Freud's less noted observations on the question of sexual difference:

It is commonly assumed that one is born either a man or a woman. [But we] must keep psychoanalysis separate from biology just as we have kept it separate from anatomy and physiology". (Freud writes in 1935 in a letter to Carl Muller Braunschweig)

The psychoanalytic two is thus different from the biological two. The psychoanalytic two in Lacan's *return to Freud*³ can be expressed through at least two tropes (if not more): (i) Ladies/Gentleman and (ii) 'frog'/'beer bottle'. Lacan thus takes us beyond the familiar mode of arriving at and accessing the two. He takes us beyond the 'conservative familiar' of biological sexual difference and the 'radical familiar' of the sex-gender distinction; he takes us to sexual difference and to *sexuation* (where sexuation is the process by which we *unconsciously* come to occupy two modes-of-being-within-language). Having inaugurated the two, Lacan moves to the relationality between the two of Ladies/Gentleman or the 'frog'/'beer bottle'. He shows, or shores up, the impossibility of the relationship between the two. However, why is it impossible? Is it impossible because it is constitutively difficult to be *related*? Then it is a problem of related-ness. Is it impossible because it is difficult to relate the sexed *two*? Then it is a problem of sexed two-ness. Alternatively, is it in the nature of the Lacanian construction of the two? Such that the way Lacan constructs Ladies/Gentleman, the two would forever remain unrelated and would be marked by a constitutive wedge or schism. However, whatever the problems of the construction of the two, it cannot be denied that Lacan raises significant questions with respect to the two of sexual difference. He also problematizes the notion of woman – "Woman with a capital W, Woman as singular in essence does not exist; Woman as an all-encompassing idea (a Platonic form) is an illusion" (footnote by Bruce Fink in Lacan, 1998: 7). There is thus a multiplicity of women, but no essence of "Womanhood" or "Womanliness" (Copjec, 2004). However, it is problematized not just in terms of pluralizing the notion of woman through adding class, race, and caste to gender. It is to problematize woman as the subject of feminism.

² The other perspective would be to see love as not limited and finite but as constitutively de-limited and infinite. While, in this paper, I have stressed the limits and the finite nature of love, my friend Sabah Siddiqi has however emphasized and drawn attention to the de-limited and the infinite nature of what could be called 'love'.

³ Is a return to Freud a return to the 'Logic of Freud'? Or is it a return to the 'Freud of Logic'; return to 'Freudian logic'; the 'Freudian logic' being different from 'Aristotelian logic' (where Aristotelian logic is represented through Aristotle's three Laws of Thought)?

The question of the sexed subject or of sexual difference would now flow through a number of sub-sections concerning a number of problems and paradoxes represented through the following:

1. *Ladies and Gentleman*: the discursive two
2. *Frog and the Beer Bottle*: the subjective two
3. *There is no such thing as a sexual relationship* [between the two]
4. "Imagine there's no woman!" "Woman does not exist". What (then) is woman? What is it to be a woman? (Lacan, 1997: 175).
5. Sexual Difference *beyond* a 'prescriptive' and an 'adaptation-ist' impulse (Mitchell, 1974: xv; Parker, 1997: 21, 2003: 97) – where psychoanalysis is not a recommendation *for* a patriarchal society but an analysis of one.

Of the above five, the first three will be developed in detail in the next three sub-sections. Problems numbered (4) and (5) will inform Section II of the paper titled 'Critical Psychology and Sexual Difference'.

1. The *two* of 'Ladies and Gentlemen'

A train arrives at a station. A little boy and a little girl, brother and sister, are seated in a compartment face to face next to the window through which the buildings along the station platform can be seen passing as the train pulls to a stop. 'Look', says the brother, 'we're at Ladies!' 'Idiot,' replies his sister, 'can't you see we're at Gentlemen?' (Lacan, 2006: 417)

In Lacan's description each child is able to see only one of the rest rooms: "it is the girl who sees 'Gentlemen' and the boy who sees 'Ladies'; as if one could see only the sex one is not, as if only the sex one is outside of could be perceived as a whole, unified locus". The 'psychical consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes' have a structure similar to that of the situation in this anecdote. Through the biological given of sitting on one side of the compartment or the other, each sex is placed in a structure, and as such is unable to see that structure. The biological differences are only of import to men and women in so far as they institute the subject into the play of the signifier. Yet, whether the subject knows it or not, it must function in relation to an arbitrary and thus absolute boundary between the two realms of Ladies and Gentlemen, a boundary installed irrevocably upon its horizon through the advent of the signifier.

Ladies and Gentlemen will be henceforth for these children two countries towards which each of their souls will strive on divergent wings, and between which a cessation of hostilities will be the more impossible since they are in truth the same country and neither can compromise on its own superiority without detracting from the glory of the other. (Lacan, 1977: 152)

This quote is paradigmatic of Lacan's move from the biological two to the *discursive two* of sexual difference. In this rendition, the 'libidinal economy' emerges as the economy of an incommensurate *two*. It is paradigmatic of Lacan's arrival from the logic of the *One* to the logic of the *two*.

What exactly do we mean by *One* and *two*? What do we also mean by the movement from the logic of the *One* to the logic of the *two*? Is it representative of a movement from conventional psychology to Lacanian psychoanalysis? Is conventional psychology the logic of the *One*? Is Lacanian psychoanalysis the logic of the *two*?

Let us first represent *One* by 'p'.

What then could be *two*?

Here there are two possibilities.

Possibility I: one can have the two of 'p' and '~p' – where '~p' does not have a self-definition or description – where '~p' is simply the 'lacking other' of 'p' – where 'p' is the standard and '~p' is that which is conceptually lagging in terms of the standard.

Possibility II: one can have the two of 'p' and 'q' where 'p' and 'q' are marked by difference (in the context of this paper the difference is one of sexual difference) and not by the binarism of 'p, ~p'.

Represented in terms of the language of logic⁴ the movement from *One* to *two* is thus a move from the purported two of 'p, ~p' (which in actuality is marked and circumscribed by the *One* of 'p') to the *two* of 'p, q'. It is also paradigmatic of a movement from conventional psychology (which understands sexual difference in terms of the logic of 'p, ~p') to Lacanian psychoanalysis (which understands sexual difference in terms of the two of 'p, q').

Having inaugurated the logic of the two of 'p, q', Lacan moves to an impossible "relationship between "them-two" (*la relation d'eux*) – them-two sexes" (Lacan, 1998: 6) – such that analytic discourse comes to be "premised solely on the statement that there is no such thing, that it is impossible to found (*poser*) a sexual relationship" (Lacan, 1998: 9). The two of psychoanalysis make an uneasy *two*; it *unmakes the One*; the two of 'p, q' can never be collapsed into *One*. The trope of Ladies/Gentleman, as such fixes structurally the place for man and woman. Yet Lacan is not an adaptationist. Nor is Lacanian psychoanalysis "concerned with strengthening the ego" (Parker, 2008: 5). It is not that each one of us would *have to* move in this direction only. Even if we have been given structural locations, we occupy uncanny subject positions – positions akin to the frog and the beer bottle. *Discourse is not the limit*.

⁴ In two-valued Aristotelian logic, the principle of bivalence is related to the 'excluded middle' and the latter is a *syntactic* expression of the language of a logic of the form 'p or ~P'.

2. *Frog and Beer-Bottle*: "the subject's own account"

Psychology is the field of the "imaginary," in the sense of the illusory. (Lacan, 2006: 65)

Žižek (1998: 173) discusses a British beer advertisement. The advertisement is set with two poles in mind – the biological pole that has two participants, the woman and the man, and the subjective pole that has two different participants, the frog and the beer-bottle. In the advertisement, a woman walks along a stream, sees a frog, takes it gently into her lap, and kisses it. The frog turns into a handsome young man. The man casts a covetous glance at the girl and in turn kisses her. The girl turns into a bottle of beer. For the biological woman, the point is that her love and affection (signalled by the kiss) turns a biological frog into a beautiful man; for the man, the point is to reduce the biological woman to a partial object, the object-cause of his desire. Because of this subjective asymmetry, "there is no such thing as a sexual relationship". We have either a woman with a man (the objective pole) or a frog with a beer bottle (the subjective/fantasmatic pole). Perhaps, this is what *intersubjectivity* is really all about; it is about standing face to face with the *subjective two of a frog embracing a beer bottle!*

The inauguration of the subjective two by Lacan (as against the biological two and in addition to the discursive two) complicates further the question of the relationship *between* the two. Given the monolingualism of 'p, ~p' in psychology, there is not much question of a relationship. However, the notion of relationship takes on an altogether different turn as soon as one inaugurates the two in general and the subjective two in particular.

3. Still Reading *Encore*: "there's no such thing as a sexual relationship"

... "there's no such thing as a sexual relationship" ... it is based only on the written in the sense that the sexual relationship cannot be written (*ne peut pas s'écrire*). Everything that is written stems from the fact that it will forever be impossible to write, as such, the sexual relationship. (Lacan, 1998: 34-35)

What does Lacan mean by "impossible to *write*"? Impossible to write what? Write the *sexual* of the relationship? Or the *relationship* of the sexual? Here Lacan's stress is not just on the term 'sexual' but also on the term 'relationship' (*Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*). Is relationship (that requires 'two' and a 'two-ness') haunted by the impossible negotiation of an incommensurate *two*, the incommensurate *two* of sexual difference?⁵ Does

⁵ This section is a take on 'The Seminar of Jacques Lacan' titled *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge* Book XX – *Encore* 1972-73. Book XX is also a work on the woman question: one must see the radical difference of what is produced at the other pole, on the basis of woman. ... for ~~Woman~~, something other than object *a* is at stake in what comes to make up for (*suppleer*) the sexual relationship that does not exist" (Lacan, 1998:

the absence of a relationship mean, "there is no relation of the sexual"? Does the assertion stress the 'sexual' such that Lacan concedes the possibility of relations *other than* the sexual? *Only the sexual belies relatedness* such that there is no such thing as a *sexual* relatedness. However, there *are* other forms of relatedness. It is the 'sexual form' that is always in question. Does he mean to say that relation is something *more than* the sexual? Or does he mean to say that "the sexual relates nothing"?

The "sexual [as such] relates nothing" is an interesting expression; what relates is *more than* the sexual; what relates is *beyond* the mere sexual. Can one then say that 'love' comes to supplement the lack of sexual rapport (see Alan Badiou in *lacanian ink* 21 – "The Scene of Two")? Does Lacan in the process problematize the idea(l) of relatedness such that he hints at the *limits* of relations, at the relation-*less-ness* of relation? Does he mean to say that relation in a closed and secure sense is an impossibility? The *whole* of the relation-ship is never ever achieved, relationship never reaches whole-ness, relation-ship is a "not-whole", the *whole* of a relation, relation-ship as *full presence* is never ever achieved. Does the relation-*less-ness* of the relation refer to this other Lacanian axiom according to which there is no wholeness (*il n'y a pas de tout*); there cannot be whole (or *the whole*) does not denote either a lack or an ablation, since there would not have been anything whole before there was not-whole. This means moreover that all that there is, is *not* a totality (*ne se totalise pas*).⁶

Where have we arrived? What does a theory of sexual difference offer us? Does it undermine our naïve optimism in 'easy legal union' (say for example through the pronouncement that marks the institution of marriage: "hereafter you are man and wife") as also in the 'possibility of the sexual relation', given that there are 'two' subjects and not just One? While psychology understands sexual difference in terms of either biological sex difference (and at times finds itself steeped in sexual conservatism), psychoanalysis offers us an escape from biologism as also from the logic of 'p, ~p'; psychoanalysis facilitates our arrival at the logic of the *two* of 'p, q'; the psychoanalytic invocation of the question of woman takes us to the question of sexual difference; the psychoanalytic invocation of the question of sexual difference takes us to the question of woman. But then, *which* woman; which understanding of woman?

To think, 'which woman' we have to think once again how we arrived at the *two* of sexual difference? Where did we begin? It was a beginning from the given of the Masculine One (we have called it 'p'). It was in such a One

63). Our relation with this text could be summed up in the rather uncharacteristic politeness that inhabits Lacan at the beginning of the text: "be my guest, be my worst" (1998:1).

⁶ Now what about the assumed whole of a 'couple'? Certainly, the couple is not a whole. The 'two' does not make One; the play of a couple of forces does not erase the gap in the contact, in the relation (*rapport*). Perhaps nothing else can represent relation (as also *jouissance*) than the *infinity* of *intimacy* (that is the non-finitude of the intimate) and the *intimacy* of *infinity* (that is intimacy being 'the being-intimate with the infinite') (Jean-Luc Nancy, *The 'there is' of Sexual Relation*, trans. Franson Manjali – manuscript).

('p') that woman appeared altogether absent. Or perhaps, woman was present, present as the 'lacking other' ('~p') of the One ('p'). We were thus faced with the two of 'p' and '~p'; which was never really two. It was in actuality *One*; the *One* of 'p', where '~p' was just the lacking complement of 'p'. One can call this the commonsensical/conventional and conservative rendition of sexual difference, which, in actuality, is *not* sexual difference, it is difference subsumed within the logic of the One and the Same ('p').

To arrive at sexual difference one needs to arrive at the logic of the two; not the two of 'p' and '~p'; but the two of 'p' and 'q'. However, this arrival at the two of 'p' and 'q' is thwarted by the foreclosure of the 'q'. Foreclosure of 'q' is, in turn, secured through the inclusion of an apparition of 'q' (we call this apparition '~p', '~p' as the *substitute signifier* of 'q') as the *constitutive inside* of the hegemonic. Psychoanalysis was perhaps one of the earliest Western European forms of thought, to have given thought to the question of sexual difference (and to woman). It was perhaps one of the earliest (apart from feminism) to have worked through the masculine hegemonic, so as to carve out, through an invocation of sexual difference, a space for woman; to have thought woman beyond the masculine libido. Psychoanalysis was perhaps one of the earliest attempts at an arrival at the *two* of sexual difference.

But then, did Lacan really arrive at the *two*? Did he really escape the *One*? Or did the structure of the *One* come to haunt once again, the structure of the *two*? Did the structure of *One*-ness get rehabilitated even at the moment of the invocation of the structure of the two? Was woman in actuality put outside even at the moment of the invocation of the two of sexual difference? Why was woman put outside? Did we lose woman because the logic of the structure was, in the last instance, phallogentric? How then can we *find-found* woman?

Section II:

Critical Psychology and Sexual Difference

This section looks at what a critical psychology perspective could do to psychology's understanding of sexual difference (which is at worst a biological understanding and at best a conservative understanding) but also to Lacan's understanding of sexual difference. First, it could shore up the question of 'woman', once again and yet again. In the process, it could move beyond the rendition of woman as the 'constitutive inside'/'lacking other' (~p) in psychology; it could also move beyond the rendition of woman as the 'absolute outside'/'Dark Continent' in Lacan (which is another way of representing the Lacanian catchphrase *Imagine there's no Woman!* [Lacan, 2006: 767]; woman is outside, woman is the unknown). Instead, it could move to an understanding where woman emerges as the 'foreclosed'/'constitutive outside' of the Symbolic; from a critical psychology perspective woman is *not* outside; *woman is that which is put outside*; woman is that which is *secreted out* at the moment of the constitution of the Symbolic; *the Symbolic is constituted through a secreting out of woman*; woman is *not* unknown; *woman emerges as the unknown*, given the

constitution of the Symbolic in terms of a phallo-centric logic (i.e. , in terms of the phallus as *point de capiton*). Since Lacan takes the phallogocentric constitution of the Symbolic as natural, the *outsided-ness* of woman (and hence the absence of the sexual relationship) appear as natural. Critical Psychology sees the Symbolic as a force field; as imbued with power (not power as brute/suppressive/overt but as the condition of *foreclosure*). Hence, a critical psychology perspective can shore up causalities where (for Lacan) apparently none seems to exist. From a critical psychology perspective, the outsided-ness of woman is caused by the phallo-centric constitution of the Symbolic (whereas since Lacan takes the phallogocentric constitution of the Symbolic as structurally given he misses out on the way woman is *secreted out* at the moment of the very constitution of the Symbolic). A different understanding of the Symbolic might as well make room for woman! And why not, make the sexual relation (that hitherto looked impossible) a possibility (even if not an easy possibility)!

Of course, this is not to deny that Lacan does open up space for the *two*; but even in Lacan's rendition, the *second* of the two remains as the 'absolute outside'. It is in this context one can ask, why does woman emerge as the absolute outside in the Lacanian rendition? Is it because the phallus once again emerges as the privileged signifier? Which is why sexual relation also emerges as impossible (*this is not to suggest that the sexual relation is instituted easily and effortlessly*)? It emerges as impossible not just because of the 'Ladies/Gentleman' and the 'frog/beer bottle' problem. It also emerges as impossible because Lacan assumes the phallus (having or not having *it* is assumed as fundamental to sexed subjectivity). Consequently, a somewhat neat and rigid spatial organization is instituted – a closed illuminated inside (of the have-s – those who have the phallus), bounded by *phallic jouissance*, and a distant-dark outside (of the have-nots – those who do not have the phallus), marked by the *Other jouissance*.

In psychology, woman emerges as the 'constitutive inside' of the Symbolic. In Lacanian psychoanalysis woman emerges as the 'absolute outside'. From a critical psychology perspective woman emerges as the 'constitutive outside' of the Symbolic – constitutive yet outside, outside yet constitutive, where inside and outside are in a dynamic relation. Such that inside and outside are produced simultaneously and *in one turn*; such that inside and outside are locked in an interminable play; requiring iteration and reiteration; and wasn't it Lacan who gave us the paradoxical trope of the *Moebius Band*; where relations between inside and outside are in flux.

Phallus as *point de capiton*

Freud ... is foiled again and again by the most valuable right-handed hitter of all time, as long as the game is baseball, the ferocious two-fisted red-blooded Phallus. Lacan could not exit the game, for he had not quit the application – based on that originary underived error of cognizance, of sexual difference. (Spivak, 1994: 65)

Lacan could not exit the game, for he had not quit the application of the phallus as *point de capiton*. "*The Meaning of the Phallus*" (1958) tries to

emphasize the place and importance of the Symbolic Order in the determination of human sexed subjectivity. This lecture is one of Lacan's "most direct expositions of the status of the phallus in the psychoanalytic account of sexuality" (Mitchell & Rose, 1985) In this essay Lacan tries to retrieve the phallus from its reduction to an object of primitive oral aggression belonging to the realm of the instinct and instead place it wholly within the Symbolic Order. He urges psychoanalysts to understand the Freudian invocation of the phallus as the invocation of a signifier in the *strict* linguistic sense of the term, because "the relation of the subject to the phallus is set up regardless of the anatomical difference between the sexes ..." (Lacan, 2001: 311-322; 1985).

In Freudian doctrine, the phallus is not a fantasy, if what is understood by that is an imaginary effect. Nor is it as such an object (part, internal, good, bad, etc. ...) in so far as this term tends to accentuate the reality involved in a relationship. It is even less the organ, penis, or clitoris, which it symbolizes. And it is not incidental that Freud took his reference for it from the simulacrum which it represented for the Ancients. *For the phallus is a signifier ... The phallus is the privileged signifier* of that mark where the share of the logos is wedded to the advent of desire. (Lacan, 2001: 316-319; italics mine)

Moreover, why is the phallus, according to Lacan, the privileged signifier?

One might say that this signifier is chosen as *what stands out 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 *by virtue of its turgidity, it is the image of the vital flow as it is transmitted in generation.* (Lacan, 2001: 318-319, italics mine; 1985)

The phallus functions as a *synecdoche*, for insofar as it is a figure of the penis, it constitutes idealization of a body part and the investment of that part with the force of symbolic law. If bodies are differentiated according to the symbolic positions that they occupy, and those symbolic positions consist in either *having* or *being* the phallus, bodies are thus differentiated and sustained in their differentiation by being subjected to the Law of the Father which dictates the "being" and "having" positions; men become men by approximating the "having of the phallus", which is to say they are compelled to approximate a "position" which is itself the result of the synecdochal collapse of masculinity into its "part", and a corollary idealization of that synecdoche as the governing symbol (Butler, 1993: 83-88). The 'having' and 'being' position comes to stand for two radically different ways in which 'speaking subjects' are split/alienated in and by Language. The *difference* in splitting initiates the *difference* between the sexes. *Sexual Difference* thus is *not* a product of biology. Instead, it is a product of the subject's differential accession to the (Lacanian) Symbolic.

Alternatively, are the differences in accession to the Symbolic and the difference in splitting a product of the fundamental difference between the two accredited forms of biological sexes? This is a contrary position, a diametrically opposite position on the question of sexual difference, a position held primarily by those who work in the space of psychology. One can name this particular understanding of sexual difference the *essentialist* understanding of sexual difference, where sexual difference is a *biological given*, where sexual difference is an immutable and foundational given; in this understanding sexual difference is the substrate that can fundamentally effects others but cannot in itself be affected by others. The other problem with psychology's understanding of sexual difference is that it is a *conservative* understanding of sexual difference (where woman is the 'lacking other' [~p]). On the other hand, if sexual difference is a product, an end-product of the four-legged mammals' differential accession to the (Lacanian) Symbolic, then sexual difference is what is *produced* through language. One can name this the *constructivist* understanding of sexual difference.

What then would be critical psychology's take on the question of sexual difference? Do we begin from a *given* two? Or do we *arrive* at the two of 'sexual difference'? Or do we need to think *beyond* a given 'sexual dimorphism' and a produced two? Do we then need to think *beyond* a division of the world into neat and watertight two-s, the *two* of nature and culture, the *two* of the given and the produced? Do we then need to think sexual difference beyond a *merely* 'essentialist understanding of sexual difference' and a *merely* 'constructivist understanding of sexual difference'? Do we need to think sexual difference as both *found* and *founded*, somewhat like the metaphor of the *two lips*? This understanding of sexual difference as the *mutual constitutivity* of sex/nature and gender/culture, this understanding of sexual difference as the beyond of sex and gender would put into disrepute a merely constructivist rendition of Lacan's formulas of sexualization; it would also put to test a narrow biological rendition of sexual difference. However to arrive at such a rendition of sexual difference one needs to problematize further the *given* rendition of sexual difference. For in the given rendition of sexual difference there are *only* two mode(l)s of accession to the Symbolic; in the given rendition the possibilities of sexed subjectivity are restricted to just *two*; and this "structural stasis of sexual binarisms" is closely reminiscent of the *two* of an unexamined order of normative heterosexuality. But then, no one is either man or woman, nor is anyone either homo- or hetero-sexual; no one is only *One*; sex is the infinite process of its own differentiation:

I am on each occasion a certain degree of combination of and differentiation between "man" and "woman", between "homosexual man" and "heterosexual man", between "homosexual woman" and "heterosexual woman", and according to the diverse combinations which opens up and closes off between one and the other, and which inter-penetrate or touch one another. (Jean-Luc Nancy, *The 'there is' of Sexual Relation*, trans. Franson Manjali – manuscript)

This "infinite combinatory-ness", this "infidel's heteroglossia", this "chameleon's choreograph" – is nothing other than what is called the sexual relation: sex is really nothing but the unhinging of the one-in-itself: but this "one" does not pre-exist sex. Thus to summarize, the problems with Lacan's rendition of sexual difference are:

- (1) a see-saw between a subtle constructionism that at times creeps in and, somewhat paradoxically, a subtle essentialism, that raises its ugly head at other times; perhaps this is not just Lacan's problem; it is a problem that has haunted the sexual difference literature
- (2) the emergence of the phallus as *point de capiton*
- (3) a consequent overemphasis on 'having' or 'not having' the phallus; hence an understanding, at a more mundane level, of 'castration' (in terms of threat/anxiety/reality) and at a more philosophical level, of 'lack' as constitutive of (sexed) subjectivity; and the consequences of making *lack* constitutive of subjectivity is far-fetched.
- (4) the far reaching consequence of the above three being the ground for the theorization of woman – a theorization where woman emerges as the absolute/unknown Other (as against her being the 'lacking other' in mainstream psychology). Taking off from the above three, Lacan constructs a universal out of the masculine; and the constructed universal *puts* the feminine *outside*; through such a posited universal, the feminine emerges as the outside.

"Freud argues that there is no libido other than the masculine. Meaning what? other than that a whole field, which is hardly negligible, is thereby ignored. This is the field of all those beings who take on the status of the woman – if, indeed, this being takes on anything whatsoever of her fate. ... By her being in the sexual relation radically Other, in relation to what can be said of the unconscious, the woman is that which relates to the Other. ... The woman relates to the signifier of this Other, in so far as, being Other, it can only remain always Other." (Lacan, 2001: 321-322; 1985)

Is the woman, and the feminine, then the metaphor for an *outside* that escapes and eludes the economy of the 'masculine'? However, how does this structure, this particular spatial disposition emerge? How does this spatial disposition with an inside (the masculine) and an outside (the feminine) emerge? Does it emerge because in the Lacanian structure we "are always led back, from stage to stage, to the contract of contracts which guarantees the unity of the signifier with the signified through all the "*points de capiton*"? Thanks to the "presence" of the *same* signifier (the phallus), of the "signifier of signifiers" beneath all the effects of the signified", because the Lacanian 'phallus' is the "transcendental signifier", because *it* finds itself sheltered within the "indivisibility of the letter, sheltered from *dissemination*, because it always reaches its destination, and because the phallus is always the privileged signifier of symbolic articulation, the 'masculine' is always produced and re-produced leaving the feminine languishing in and as the "dark continent".

That is what analytic discourse demonstrates in that, to one of these beings qua sexed, to man in so far as he is endowed with the organ said to be phallic – I said, “said to be” – the corporal sex (*sexe corporel*) or sexual organ (*sexe*) of woman – I said “of woman,” whereas in fact *woman* does not exist,⁷ woman is *not whole* (*pas toute*) – woman’s sexual organ is of no interest (*ne lui dit rien*) except via the body’s *jouissance*. ... Analytic experience attests precisely to the fact that everything revolves around *phallic jouissance*, in that woman is defined by a position that I have indicated as “not-whole” (*pas tout*) with respect to phallic *jouissance*. (Lacan, 1998: 7)

In its flirtations with the incommensurate *two* of sexual difference, psychoanalysis comes face to face with phallic *jouissance* and Other *jouissance*; “Analytic experience attests precisely to the fact that everything revolves around phallic *jouissance*, in that woman is defined by a position that I have indicated as “not whole” (*pas tout*) with respect to phallic *jouissance*” (Lacan, 1998: 7). In its flirtations with phallic *jouissance* and the Other *jouissance*, or the “*jouissance* of the Other” (Lacan, 1998: 24), Lacan comes face to face with the ‘universal’ – with that around which everything revolves; *everything revolves around phallic jouissance and analytic experience attests precisely to the fact that everything revolves around phallic jouissance*. In its flirtations with the (*posited*) ‘universal’, psychoanalysis comes face to face with the *exception*, with the *not-whole*, with perhaps that which *escapes* the (*posited*) universal; psychoanalysis comes face to face with woman as *not-whole*. Posited in terms of the Borromean Knot of the Imaginary-Symbolic-Real, psychoanalysis, as such, comes face to face with the ‘Lacanian Real’; with ‘sexual difference as Real’ as it does with ‘woman as Real’ (the ‘Real of sexual difference’ or the ‘Real of woman’ is understandable; but ‘woman as Real’ relegates woman to the realm of the outside, the ‘absolute outside’).

Lacan nearly brings up an “unproblematized sexual antagonism” – that is about ‘sexual difference’ nevertheless, but the status of *jouissance* insofar as it is sexual has the privilege of being specified by an impasse. He also “unwittingly installs a heterosexual matrix as a permanent and incontestable structure” in which ‘woman’ operates as the ‘outside’ of discourse. Why does this happen? It happens as the result of a tenacious form of phallocentrism that haunts the Lacanian logic.

Such is the ‘tenacity of prejudice’.

The error of phallocentrism is one of thought, not merely, or only, of behavior. By highlighting patriarchy’s irrational and contradictory forms (where conscious commitments may contradict unconscious dispositions;

⁷ Fink’s (1998: 7) footnote is important: Lacan is asserting here that Woman with a W, woman as singular in essence, does not exist; Woman as an all-encompassing idea (a Platonic form) is an illusion. There is a multiplicity of women, but no essence of “Womanhood” or “Womanliness”. Hence nothing can be said of the woman. (Lacan, 1985) This less than modest assertion of Lacan represents his understanding of the fact that there is no signifier for, or essence of, Woman as such. Woman thus can only be written under erasure: ~~Woman~~.

where politically correct statements may be secretly marked by deep bias), one can understand how Lacan – even at the moment of the inauguration of the question of sexual difference – gets circumscribed by the structure of prejudice. Sexism's material and discursive history tends to ignore the impalpable forms of prejudice; it ignores the (il)legible script on the wax slab. While Lacan was the one who had directed our attention to unconscious and impalpable forms of prejudice, as well as to illegible scripts on the wax slab, we turn the tables on him (use the master's tool to break into the master's house) to show how he himself is a victim of unconscious impalpable forms of prejudice – how he is imprisoned by near illegible scripts on his wax slab at the moment of the invocation of sexual difference. It is perhaps because of such phallogocentric prejudice that the metaphor of the Dark Continent keeps coming back; such is the tenacity of prejudice.

Language and Woman:

There are two conceptions of the unconscious: the *descriptive* and the *dynamic* ... for phenomenology, the unconscious can be made intelligible only in terms of a *linear continuum model*, of which the two earlier segments are the conscious and the preconscious... Husserlian phenomenology can appropriate the unconscious by way of a further extension of *horizon analysis*⁸. Since horizon analysis is a phenomenological technique of dealing with implicit senses, to say that the unconscious can be dealt with by way of horizon analysis is to assume that the unconscious is only the implicit. *But* for Freud, the unconscious is essentially a force antithetical to the thrust of the ego; it is that which calls the ego into question and hence the ego can only sustain itself by denying the unconscious. Between the two is set up an anti-thetic of forces. The unconscious is not merely a penumbra of the conscious, but a veritable power raised up against it. This difference in the understanding of the unconscious leads to a consequential difference in the interpretation of repression. Phenomenology lacks the dynamic concept of repression as instituting the unconscious; the equivalent to this within phenomenological reflection would be merely the residual notion of 'not yet clearly seen'. (Rajan, 1991: 105)

Taking off from these two conceptions of the unconscious – from a conception of the unconscious that is spatially beyond, beyond in a horizontal sense ("the residual notion of 'not yet clearly seen'") and a conception of the unconscious that is *anti-thetic* to the Conscious, that is a "veritable power raised up" against what has emerged as the Conscious – one can also distinguish between two conceptions of the outside – the phenomenological (or what could be called the linear continuum model) and the psychoanalytic (or the dynamic model). Thus the residual notion of 'not yet clearly seen', the *remainder*, the *unspeakable rim* needs to be clearly distinguished from 'what is *not shown*' in and by the hegemonic, from what remains *unspoken* in the hegemonic, from the *reminder*. 'Woman' could thus be understood in two ways:

- (i) as the *unspoken* of (hegemonic) language and

⁸ Critical Psychology is not 'horizon analysis'; it is the acknowledgement of the Symbolic as a force field.

(ii) as the *unspeakable* limit of language.

Moitra (1984) shows how two forms of silence could possibly unfold within the folds of silence – the *unspoken* and the *unspeakable*.⁹ While the *unspeakable* marks “the end point of language, the ultimate cut-off point where language does not reach”, the *unspoken* stands for silence, which is “found within language and not beyond language”. Silence as the *unspoken* is a constitutive factor of language, and necessarily so. The *unspeakable* represents the limits of language; the elusive *outside* of language, an *outside* that is neither shown nor said. The *unspoken* is constitutive of language, hence inside language *yet* outside language; the *unspoken* is the *constitutive outside* of language as that which cannot be said but which is *shown*.¹⁰

This is important because in Lacanian psychoanalysis ‘woman’ is imagined to be “outside language”; or perhaps that which is “outside language” is woman; hence woman is *unspeakable*. In this rendition of language, in this picture of language we are forced to imagine language as a kind of spatial territory/imagery, which can have an outside and an inside. And as soon as such a spatial picture of language is established, the picture of an outside and an inside (of language) is given shape. “The belief in the beyond of discourse [in the beyond of phallic *jouissance*] as well as the further belief that entities beyond discourse are always struggling and straining to disrupt it ... leads to an obsession with boundaries, borderlines, and limits, which will be proclaimed as the place where “representation” ... breaks down” (Moi, 2004: 861). But how does the spatial picture of language (with an inside and an outside) come to colonize our imagination of representation? This arises when (1) we think of language primarily as consisting of *nouns* and (2) when we think a *theory of representation* to be a theory of language. “That this is a horribly impoverished notion of what language is, is Wittgenstein’s starting point for the whole of *Philosophical Investigations* (1968 [1953]). As Wittgenstein says, such a theory [of language] thinks primarily of nouns and a few other nounlike categories”¹¹ (Moi, 2004: 863). The point, then, is not that Lacan and other post-Saussureans are wholly wrong. By definition, the referent of a noun is “outside language”. Hence, if all referents are outside language, why would the *jouissance* of woman (or ‘woman’ herself) be singled out to be radically different from other nouns? In the language game called “representation”, it makes sense to distinguish between an inside and an outside of language.

⁹ In our work on the Lacanian Real, in our efforts at turning Lacan *ab*-original the distinction between the *unspoken* and the *unspeakable* have offered important clues; the *unspoken* and *unspeakable* have respectively been designated as the ‘real’ and the ‘Real’ (Dhar, 2006).

¹⁰ This is somewhat akin to Mitchell’s (2000: 6) reading of the unconscious: “The unconscious ... is not a deep, mysterious place, whose presence, in mystical fashion, accounts for all the unknown; *it is knowable and it is normal*. What it contains is normal thought, utterly transformed by its own laws (which Freud called the primary process), but nevertheless only transformed and hence still recognizable if one can deduce the manner of the transformation, that is, decipher the laws of the primary process to which the thought is subjected”.

¹¹ If language is understood primarily in terms of nouns and a few other noun-like categories, exclusion becomes, in turn, a question exclusive to excluded ‘figures’; exclusion becomes a question of *who* is excluded.

But representation is only one of the games we can play with language (Moi, 2004: 862-3). Hence it is *not* just woman that is outside language. All of language, the whole of language is haunted by an outside, a remainder, an unspeakable rim, an *unsaid*.

Given such a picture of language, given such an inside and outside of language, given such a speakable and unspeakable of language, given such a said and unsaid of language it would not be out of context to turn to Wittgenstein:

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*]. (1994 [1922]: 3)

Hence, according to Wittgenstein 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” or perhaps to ‘speak the unspeakable’ is rather meaningless; no amount of straining will get us to the unthinkable-unspeakable.

What *interpretation can hit at* with some effort (and that is the importance of the psychoanalytic attitude) is what is ‘unspoken’ within the ‘given of language’ (as also the ‘language of given-s’), what is purportedly and contingently ‘unthinkable’, given the given of language, what in actuality is a *rem(a)inder* and not just a remainder. In this sense ‘woman’ is the ‘unspoken’ of *given* language; ‘woman’ is what is projected as ‘unthinkable’ and ‘unknowable’; ‘woman’ is thus the *rem(a)inder* of what was *foreclosed* in the phallogocentric closure of libidinal economy; ‘woman’ is not just remainder; in a word, ‘woman’ is not the ‘Dark Continent’ but the continent of that which was rendered dark, given what was lit up.

It is thus not enough to displace Lacan’s post-Saussurean linguistics by Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language. It is not enough to displace the *pre*-oedipal by the *non*-oedipal or perhaps *an*-oedipal. For some (Moi, 2004: 872-875) it is also important to displace Lacan’s muddled and generalized use of the term ‘castration’/‘lack’ by the less sexist ‘finitude’. Moi shows how McDougall considers psychoanalysis to be a form of thought that attempts to understand the psychic consequences of three moments: the fact that there are *others* (there is an Egyptian within Jewish monotheism, there is a monotheist within Egyptian paganism), that there is *difference*; the fact of

sexual difference (the fact that there are others of a different sex than mine); and the fact of *death* (the *beyond* of the pleasure principle). For Moi all three moments are related in one way or the other to *finitude* and cannot be reduced to 'lack understood in terms of *castration*'. It is in this context that Moi asks: *must* the fact of finitude, the fact of being *othered*, *sexed-gendered*, or *mortal*, be figured as *lack*, lack understood in terms of *castration*?

A movement away from the hitherto exclusive focus on lack-as-castration or castration-as-lack to an acknowledgement of finitude would produce a different and a more nuanced understanding of sexual difference and the sexual relation and would not fall into the trap of either 'easy relationalities' or 'impossible relationalities'.

In conventional psychology, the trap is one of easy relationalities. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, in spite of the invocation of the *two* of sexual difference, the trap is one of the impossibility of relationalities. In conventional psychology, woman is the 'constitutive inside' of the Symbolic, such that relationalities look easy. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, woman emerges as the 'absolute outside' of the Symbolic, such that relationalities look impossible. What would a Critical Psychology perspective be in this context? Given that there is in psychology no understanding of sexual difference (woman is only the 'lacking other' of man in psychology), Critical Psychology cannot but be critical of psychology. On the other hand, Critical Psychology would be somewhat apposite with Lacanian psychoanalysis. However, it would still have a few differences with Lacan. Because, even in Lacan, even at the moment of the inauguration of sexual difference, woman emerges as the distant and dark continent of an Other *jouissance*, an unknown *jouissance*. This is of course not to suggest that woman is easily known. It is only to resist the extreme unknowability with which woman comes to be haunted in (Western) thought. Critical Psychology shows how through a structuring of the field of *jouissance* through the phallus as nodal signifier, woman is *put outside*. It shows how such structuring is the condition of the foreclosure of woman. Only then, one knows why woman emerges as either lacking or as unknown.

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