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The Ethics of Psychoanalysis *Encore*, Beyond the Limits of Speculative Reason

To approach philosophy psychoanalytically has sometimes meant looking for the ways in which sexual difference might be inscribed in conceptual thought. Jacques Lacan's writing of masculine and feminine positions within discourse, his formulas of sexuation, could be read as a template for such inscription. This would imply that masculinity and femininity had to do with different ways of constructing logical syllogisms or paradoxes; where the former represented the rule at the expense of an exception, and the latter the impossibility to establish the 'for all' of a rule. Despite its formalism, this approach carries the risk of becoming an essentialist one. Joan Copjec's 1994 'Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason,' which found an homology between Lacan's formulas and the two classes of conflict that form the antinomy of pure reason in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), may fall under the latter category. Copjec's argument established a parallel between the mathematical class of conflicts, concerning the homogeneity of phenomena, and femininity; and the dynamical class of conflicts, where Kant presents the hypothesis of a causality from freedom, and masculinity. Another approach would be to say that sexual difference inscribes itself in thought each time in a singular manner; or, as Monique David-Ménard put it, 'as the necessity of a contingency'.¹ Through this lens sexual difference appears as a provisional construction that emerges from an encounter of singular erotic, affective and symbolic histories and that affects the process of writing, and of falling in love, in a way that can only be partially understood.

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From within this perspective my aim in this essay is twofold: I would like to propose an interpretation of Lacan's Seminar *Encore*, 1972–1973 as being about an ethical turn in the psychoanalytic discussion of feminine sexuality; as well as a feminine turn in Lacan's ethics of psychoanalysis. In the same way that Kant's first *Critique* can be said to invite the passage from the point of view of

¹ Monique David-Ménard, *Les constructions de l'universel; Psychanalyse, philosophie*, Paris: PUF, 2009, p. 174. My translation.

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theoretical reason to that of practical reason, *Encore* invites the passage from the perspective of man to the perspective of woman. This shift of point of view, in Kant, happens as he moves from the mathematical to the dynamical class of conflicts in the antinomy, through the unwarranted act of accepting the hypothesis of freedom. As David-Ménard has shown, this step involves a ‘loss of rigour’ in theoretical thought that responds to the practical interest of reason in this hypothesis; that is, ‘a relative negligence of the theoretical investigation regarding existence’.² The price of this negligence in *Encore* is that from the point of view of theory (man), ‘the woman does not exist’. While from the point of view of practice (woman), there is a feminine *jouissance* that ‘puts us on the path of ex-sistence’.³ The interpretation that I propose reverses Copjec’s alignment due to the contingent fact of women’s historical exclusion from autonomy. At the same time, I would like to articulate this reading with a speculative theory of female sexuality that appeared in the late nineteen-sixties in the United States, which claimed the biological insatiability of the feminine sexual drive and sought to debunk the psychoanalytic hypothesis of the vaginal orgasm, postulating instead a structural insatisfaction at the core of femininity and thus a non-proportion (*non-rapport*) between the sexes. Through the discourse of love, and by translating the ‘myth of the vaginal orgasm’ into the in English untranslated feminine *jouissance*, Lacan found a way of maintaining the theoretical insatiability of the drive alongside the practical possibility of love; namely, through a dynamical conflict of reason allowing the coexistence of heterogenous registers. For Lacan, according to whom love feminises, this dynamical solution to the ‘riddle of femininity’ was a feminine one. This does not mean that it was necessarily a feminist one, yet aligning the discursive position of woman with the regulative horizon of Kantian reason can be.

What does reason want?

The central concern of Immanuel Kant’s critical philosophy is the natural tendency of thought towards the absolute, going from the conditioned to its condition *ad infinitum*. Reason’s insatiable character leads her beyond the limits of

² Monique David-Ménard, *La folie dans la raison pure; Kant lecteur de Swedenborg*, Paris: Vrin, 1990, p. 57.

³ Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality; The Limits of Love and Knowledge Book XX, Encore 1972–73*, New York, London: WW Norton & Company, 1998, translated by Bruce Fink, p. 77[71]. (Reference to the French edition will be given in brackets).

sensibility posing a danger to sanity and political stability. Beyond the secure land of phenomena, the kind of ‘visionary rapture’ (*Schwärmerei*) that destroys the mind and the revolutionary rapture that can destabilise society threaten.⁴ However, asserting reason’s prerogative to trespass the limits of the sensibly given is also the condition of an ethics and politics based on freedom and self-determination. Often, as in a remark in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* [1790], Kant denounces governments for using religion to provide ready-made images of what this beyond contains so as to save citizens the bother to think for themselves, thus transforming them into passive and ‘more easily dealt with’ individuals.⁵ The task of a critique is to show how this quest for the unlimited encounters a kind of limit in its own inadequacy for apprehending the totality of the phenomenal world. If dealt with carefully, this inadequacy can lay a ground for morality. The antinomy of pure reason in the first *Critique* is a version of this ground. Through it Kant secures a place for a ‘beyond phenomena’ that, while not being purely formal, is nevertheless emptied of positive determinations. It is as this ‘beyond phenomena’ that I read Lacan’s hypothesis of a feminine *jouissance*, or a *jouissance* ‘beyond the phallus’.⁶

In an article published in the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* in 1966, which sought to update psychoanalysis on the recent discoveries in the biology of sex, ‘The Evolution and Nature of Female Sexuality in Relation to Psychoanalytic Theory’, Mary Jane Sherfey spoke of another sort of dangerous limitlessness. She claimed that ‘theoretically, a woman could go on having orgasms indefinitely if physical exhaustion did not intervene’.⁷ This was based on the findings of the Masters and Johnson report (1966), which popularised the female multiple orgasm and the idea of a non-proportion of enjoyment between the sexes.⁸ From this premise Sherfey derived the controversial conclusion that the insatiability of the feminine sexual drive was the primary threat to the property rights and kingship laws sustaining modern civilization. And this, because

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, Cambridge: CUP, 2000, 5:275, p. 157.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5:275, p. 156.

⁶ Lacan, p. 74 [69].

⁷ Mary Jane Sherfey, ‘The evolution and nature of female sexuality in relation to psychoanalytic theory’ *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 1996 Jan; 14 (1), pp. 28–128, p. 117.

⁸ Simone de Beauvoir had also written, in *The Second Sex* (1949), that ‘woman’s sex feeling extends towards infinity’, New York: Vintage, 1989, pp. 395–396.

the ‘inordinately high ... orgiastic capacity’ of the female was antagonistic to the activities of child rearing and settled family life with known parentage required for modern culture to thrive. Through this hypothesis Sherfey provided the feminine counterpart of the myth of *Totem and Taboo* [1913], which is about the founding of society on the limitation of male sexual enjoyment. In Freud’s myth this limit is given by parricide: in order to gain access to the women, the brothers of the primal horde kill the father who kept them all to himself. In Sherfey’s myth, women’s sexual enjoyment is curtailed in a long and arduous process of their subjugation by patriarchy: through genital mutilation, the imposition of monogamy, childcare, etc. Most of the time, however, she adds, the suppression is only partial.⁹

Based on this, we could introduce the formulas of sexualisation from the point of view of their contingent origin in psychoanalytic myths of the limitation of sexual enjoyment: Lacan places on the masculine side the myth of *Totem and Taboo*, described as ‘there exists one man [the father of the primal horde] who is not castrated/submitted to the phallic function’ $[\exists x \neg \Phi x]$, and ‘all men are castrated/submitted to the phallic function’ $[\forall x \Phi x]$. On the feminine side, I propose that we place Mary Sherfey’s myth as a potential source of the formalisation, where ‘there is no woman who is not submitted to the phallic function’ $[\neg \exists x \neg \Phi x]$, since our civilization depends on this submission; and ‘non-all woman is submitted to the phallic function’ $[\neg \forall x \Phi x]$, since women’s subjugation, as Sherfey said, is never complete.¹⁰ The excessive feminine sexual drive lurks as a latent disruptive force beneath civilization in the place that Kant gave to lawless freedom.

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Starting from the very title, these fictions of insatiability meet playfully in *Encore*, a seminar that oscillates between the registers of anatomy, myth and metaphysics. The result is, in the post 1968 climate of sexual revolution, a return to Freud via the transcendental. In 1905 Freud had put forth the theory that feminine sexual maturity consisted in the transfer from clitoral —understood as phallic — to vaginal, or properly feminine, enjoyment. This ‘transfer theory’, especially in the work of some Freudian analysts in the 1940s, and particularly

⁹ Sherfey, p. 121.

¹⁰ I translate ‘pas-toute’ as non-all and not the standard not-all, to make the parallel with Kant’s infinite or indefinite judgement, which limits the field of possibility internally apparent, leaving determination incomplete.

Helene Deutsch, had a distinctly normative sound to Second Wave feminists, for it equated healthy and mature femininity with heterosexuality and reproduction, while interpreting the absence of vaginal orgasm —reached only through intercourse— as frigidity.¹¹ The evidence for the existence of vaginal orgasms was women’s claims to experience them, while sexology in the 1950s and 1960s held that it was impossible to corroborate any distinction between clitoral and vaginal orgasms in anatomy. Part of the feminist critique of psychoanalysis then had focused on reclaiming the clitoris, as opposed to the vagina, as the site of feminine sexual pleasure and symbol of women’s liberation. Feminists like Anne Koedt, whose ‘Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm’ from 1968 became a classic in the Women’s Liberation Movement, readily used these results in support of the clitoris-centred sexuality of women, which was, thus, proven to be just as aggressive, active and autonomous as men’s. The ‘vaginal orgasm’ as the culmination of femininity and the arrival of sexual maturity for the woman was, for this movement, the equivalent of the substantialised religious ‘beyond’ that Kant warned us against. Where radical feminists said ‘the vaginal orgasm does not exist’, Lacan said ‘the woman does not exist’.¹² However, through a ‘loss of rigour’ in theoretical thought, appealing to the word of the mystics and risking to lapse into theology, Lacan also professed a faith in an Other *jouissance*, a feminine one, perhaps in an attempt to restore legitimacy to Freud’s account of feminine sexuality despite and in a way that integrated the feminist/scientific challenge.¹³ What resulted was a sort of Kantian ‘transcendental reflection’ on feminine sexuality where, just as Kant confronts skeptical empiricism with dogmatic idealism, Lacan confronts the reductionist biology of sex with the quasi-psychotic literary trope that personifies God as a woman/whore.¹⁴

¹¹ Jane Gerhard, ‘Revisiting “The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm”: The Female Orgasm in American Sexual Thought and Second Wave Feminism’, in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2, Women and Health (Summer, 2000), pp. 449–476 (p. 461).

¹² In an interview from 1974 for the Italian magazine *Panorama*, Lacan also says that ‘common man’ does not exist, and comments that in his forty years of psychoanalytic practise, he has only encountered individuals. Interview published in the *Magazine Littéraire*, No. 28, (February, 2004). My translation.

¹³ In this regard, Lacan’s aim does not differ much from Sherfey’s, although she adopts the ‘scientific’, speculative perspective to present her argument.

¹⁴ Here, Georges Bataille and his text *Madame Edwarda* (1937, 1956), to which Lacan makes explicit reference in *Encore* would occupy the place that, according to Monique David-Ménard, Swedenborg’s delusions occupied for Kant. For an account on the difference between the psychotic and the mystical vectors of feminine *jouissance*, see Jelica Šumič

Seen from the point of view of 1960s feminist biology, feminine sexuality appears as phallic (clitoral) and is, at best, caught in the paradox of ‘satiation-in-insatiation’; that is, in a theoretical infinitude that finds a limit in physical exhaustion.¹⁵ From this perspective, ‘there is no sexual relation (proportion)’ and ‘the woman’, as in: the mature heterosexual woman/mother, fully satisfied in her accomplished transfer, does not exist. However, from the point of view of analytic practise, love is what makes up (*supplée à*) for the absence of the sexual relation.¹⁶ Thus, *Encore* can be read as an attempt to poeticise the scientific discussion of feminine sexuality, with its tendency to reduce the body to a mechanism that responds to the right technique.¹⁷ Lacan poeticises by interpreting the ‘myth’ of the vaginal orgasm as a transcendental idea bearer of an ethical quality; translating it, as we said, into a feminine *jouissance* beyond the phallus, and thus beyond the clitoris, the sexologist’s laboratory and, we may add with Sherfey, the patriarchal limitation of the feminine sexual drive. This supplementary *jouissance*, for Lacan, was not rooted in anatomy nor reserved only for women and it even maintained a privileged relationship to God. However, by remaining non-all, this structure limits the potentially psychotic excesses of the fantasy of woman as whole (the phallic mother). Lacan’s point in this seminar is well summed up in the idea that making love is poetry while the act of love is the ‘male’s polymorphous perversion’, there being a world of difference between the two.¹⁸ What is at stake in *Encore* is the passage from a speculative theory of feminine sexuality to a psychoanalytic ethics of a/sexual love.¹⁹

Riha, « L’écriture mystique ou la “jouissance d’être” » *Filozofski vestnik*, vol. XXXI, no. 2, 2010, pp. 95–119.

¹⁵ Sherfey, p. 124.

¹⁶ Lacan, p. 45 [45].

¹⁷ This is not, however, to belittle the import of this gesture for general enlightenment and feminism. I am only presenting a caricaturised version of this ‘American science’ as it seems to have appeared to Lacan due to his ironic remarks; namely that it was a ‘connerie’ in its literal sense of ‘cunt’ affair (Lacan, p. 75 [70]). Sherfey, however, speaks of the difference between satiation and satisfaction, admitting to that the latter is possible even in the absence of orgasm, although, she adds, not likely to persist in the long term. Sherfey, p. 117.

¹⁸ Lacan, p. 72 [68].

¹⁹ Where the / signifies that loving like a woman means to have access both to phallic *jouissance* and feminine *jouissance*.

From theory to ethics

Thus I had to deny knowledge (das Wissen aufheben) in order to make room for faith. Immanuel Kant²⁰

And then I realised that what constituted my course was a sort of “I don’t want to know anything about it”.

I believe in the jouissance of the woman insofar as it is extra (en plus).

Jacques Lacan²¹

Kant’s critique of reason is permeated by a structuring ‘difference’: each of its concepts is constructed from two different points of view. The point of view depends on the use reason needs to be put to or the interests it will serve. The second preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason* announces two aims for the project or two possible uses of reason: a negative use that would consist in limiting the natural predisposition of reason to speculate beyond what it can know and a positive use that would consist in its expansion. In the first *Critique* Kant chooses the negative use, yet tells us later that this use can, seen from another angle, appear as a positive one. For, if Kant limits, it is in order to set free. The gesture of limitation is always accompanied by one of amplification. To limit the categories of the understanding to phenomena makes room for reason to ‘invent’ new conditions of possibility of experience. Thus, these aims could, at first sight, be seen as contradictory, yet by understanding that they correspond to a single gesture of drawing a boundary, observed from two different points of view, it is possible to see that they work hand in hand towards a single end. Ultimately united in the highest ideal of reason, the Highest Good, the interests are the speculative (theoretical) and the practical (moral). If speculative reason is forbidden to make statements about how things really are, in themselves, absolutely and transcendently, it is only in order that practical reason will be able to say how they ‘ought to be’. It is the task of speculative reason to limit its own domain in order that reason can be expanded practically.

²⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998, translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, BXXX, p. 117.

²¹ Lacan, p.1 [9] and p. 77 [71].

The trope of limitation and expansion is redoubled by another topological opposition which is that of lack and plenitude. In turn, these are mapped onto a distinction between what from one point of view appears as knowledge and faith, and from the other as knowing and thinking. What a critique of speculative reason limits is the domain of knowledge to apply strictly to the objects of possible experience, existing in space and time. Meanwhile, this limitation constructs anything beyond it as a space that is necessarily empty of objects. This ‘empty space’ is inscribed within the structure as ‘room for faith’. It is only from the point of view of ethics, when this empty space needs to be filled, that the opposition knowledge/faith will become knowledge/thought. Practical thought will be able to expand reason, cover the lack, fill the empty space with, every time, singular acts of its own invention in an operation analogous to what poetry and love are for Lacan.²²

Kantian critical thought and Lacanian psychoanalysis understand and inhabit the limit of knowledge; not as the limit of reason but as the limit that reason must both police and dare to trespass in the interest of truth, as freedom. As Lacan put it, ‘this tangible frontier between truth and knowledge is precisely where analytic discourse is held’.²³ Truth, however, like freedom, can only be half-spoken. In the famous phrase about denying knowledge Kant is not —as Theodor Adorno would have it— excusing himself for having had to undermine ‘reason’ in order to sustain his critical project. He is simply describing the task he traced for the *Critique*: to limit speculative reason in order to leave room for ethics. ‘Room for faith’ is nothing other than the *noumenon* seen as necessarily empty (of objects) or as ‘needing to be filled’, depending on whether it is seen from the point of speculative or of practical reason. And this movement, in which knowledge is denied (*aufgehoben*) so that the noumenon can appear, not as positive but as ‘room for belief’ is the path that Lacan traces for psychoanalysis — a path that goes from ‘I don’t want to know anything about it’ to an ‘I believe in the jouissance of the woman’.

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²² This is what, for Jacques-Alain Miller, constitutes Lacan’s originality with respect to Freud: that love for Lacan is invention, and invention precisely in this sense, as prompted by the bar through the Other, or the prohibition to let any object in the phenomenal world occupy this space. J.A. Miller, *Lógicas de la vida amorosa*, Buenos Aires: Ediciones Manantial, 1991, p. 17.

²³ Jacques Lacan, *Le savoir du Psychanalyste; Entretiens à Sainte Anne, 1971–1972, 4 Novembre 1971* in: <http://psicoanalysis.org/lacan/sp-4-11.htm>, my translation.

Kant thought that there was a privileged point of view from which the critical project could be seen, that of practical reason, and therefore wrote to be read through a shift of perspective in which we, as it were, change reasons. Lacan wants us to ride on his speech as in a Möbius strip, to end up appearing on the other side of reason, which is not unreason but another reason. Referring, in *Encore*, to Rimbaud's poem *À une raison*, Lacan says: 'In Rimbaud's text, love is the sign, indicated as such, that one is changing reasons, and that is why the poet addresses that reason. One changes reasons — in other words, one changes discourses.'²⁴ 'One changes reasons', supported on that supplement that poetry is for the Lacanian discourse, is the central matheme of *Seminar XX*, a seminar often read as being only about feminine sexuality and the inexistence of the sexual relation/proportion, about the impossibility of writing 'the' woman, because, in these readings, the shift has not taken place. If the emphasis lies on the limiting function, then the interest/gaze of the reading is probably speculative, and vice-versa. What would account for a good interpretation would not be to present either one of these poles but to show their relationship of interdependence, acknowledging that practical reason has primacy over speculative. The title of the English translation by Bruce Fink of *Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge* goes even further than the speculative reading. If the seminar is about the limits of knowledge, it in no way suggests that love would also be limited. In fact, love, like practical reason, is precisely what is unlimited. Sexual traits, says Lacan, are contingent, and 'men' and 'women' are signifiers. The problem is the passage from contingency to necessity; from the 'it stops not being written' (*cesse de ne pas s'écrire*) of the sexual trait to the 'it doesn't stop being written' (*ne cesse pas de s'écrire*) nécessaire of love. This possibility of passage is constantly opened by the text, and, would it happen, for it can only be written in the conditional, things would begin to look quite different.

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Lacan constructs sexual difference as a matter of perspective and demands that, through an act of love, we change from the masculine point of view, wholly embedded within phallic *jouissance*, to the feminine point of view, from which feminine *jouissance* is accessible. If this amounts to a change of reason it is because the point of view of man is that of speculative reason, whose horizon is the limit of what we can know, while the point of view of woman is that of prac-

²⁴ Lacan, p. 16 [20].

tical reason, whose horizon is the infinity of what we can hope: the absolute unity towards which reason tends. Thus, the not/non-all also has two different meanings. On the one hand it refers to the mathematical incompleteness that condemns the phenomenal world to Zeno's paradox — the fact that we could never apprehend nature in its complete extension, or the infinite regress in the series of appearances. On the other, it refers to the regulative and not constitutive status of complete determination; that is, the infinite regress in the dynamic series of causes and effects.²⁵ Lacan's Other *jouissance*, which cannot be known but only experienced, as Kant himself talks about the satisfaction of reason by the moral law, is on the side of the latter form of incompleteness; on the side of the indeterminacy of truth.²⁶ Thus, if the passage from knowledge to faith is the task of the *Critique*, it is not because in it reason paradoxically needs to be abandoned in favour of some doctrine or irrational attachment to an hypostasized idea of God, but because practical reason cannot be proven theoretically. From the point of view of theoretical reason, practical reason can only remain a hypothesis — the hypothesis with which Lacan enters, in 1972, the unconscious.²⁷

Two Ways to Enjoy

What the male and female sides modify is, principally, the concept of *jouissance*:

On one side, *jouissance* is marked by the hole that does not leave it any other way than that of phallic *jouissance*. On the other side, can something be attained that would tell us how, what until now was nothing but a fault (*faillie*), gap in *jouissance* could be realised?²⁸

From the perspective of phallic *jouissance* or speculative reason, the picture is marked by a hole: the empty space reserved for the noumenon in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This is also the point of view that Freud speaks from, when,

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²⁵ For a discussion of complete determination in relation to Lacan's logic of the *pastout*, see Tania Espinoza, 'Cosmopolitanism of the Not-All; from a Psychoanalytic Point of View' in Rebecka Letteval and Kristian Petrov (Eds), *Critique of Cosmopolitan Reason* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2014)

²⁶ Lacan, p. 103 [94].

²⁷ I do not enter there [to the unconscious]' said Lacan, 'no more than did Newton, without a hypothesis'. *Ibid.*, p. 142 [129].

²⁸ Lacan, p. 8 [14]. Translation modified.

through little Hans, in 'Analysis of a Phobia of a Five-Year-Old Boy' from 1909, he describes the little girl as castrated. Freud's account of sexuality will be, to a great extent, marked by the impossibility of seeing woman as anything else than a castrated phallic mother. Paraphrasing Lacan: to see woman as marked by an absence leaves no other way to jouissance than the phallic.

The attainment of the Other jouissance, which is the jouissance seen from the other point of view, is here followed by a question mark because, like Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Lacan is here writing from a speculative/masculine point of view, yet with a practical/feminine interest. That is, he is not yet allowed to establish the apodictic certainty of whatever goes beyond the boundaries of the phenomenal world, but he can admit its viability as a hypothesis. Here the question mark opens the possibility of attaining this other jouissance, along with the possibility that the fault/gap (*faille/béance*) became, with its attainment, something else. On the contrary, phallic satisfaction will be condemned by the attempt to 'make up for' this hole, to compensate for the woman's castration with, for example, a fetish. Lacan recognises that Freud formulated sexuality from the point of view that cannot but produce the opposition castrated/phallic, in the same way that speculative reason cannot but produce the opposition knowledge/faith. However, rather than correcting it by adding the 'female side' of the story, say, an opposition vaginal/phallic, Lacan leaves the debate over feminine sexuality to the side of the man/speculation and reserves for woman's side the discussion of love and ethics.

Or at least, all Lacan says here about feminine sexuality is that, in the psychoanalytic discourse, it is always presented from a masculine viewpoint: The woman does not function in the sexual relation except as the mother.²⁹ Yet, precisely by this fact, the discursive nature of the reality founded on such conception of sexuality becomes apparent. Since the feminine cannot be just that, then 'woman is non-all his', that is, *of discourse*. Freud's and science's failure to produce an account of feminine sexuality becomes for Lacan the justification to assign the signifier 'woman' the place of that which exceeds this discourse on sexuality; the place of that which is in relation both to phallic jouissance and to 'something more'. This doubling of woman means that she is both a sexed being and has access to being as such, that is, as asexual.

²⁹ Lacan, p. 35 [36].

While, from the point of view of feminism, the relative advantage of such a gesture might be questionable, it must be assessed in the context of Kant's own gendering of the ethical question, which Lacan here reverses. Woman is not, as Kant held in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), excluded from ethics. We could also imagine Lacan as tacitly addressing Simone de Beauvoir's criticism of psychoanalysis's deterministic account of sexuality, by not only shifting the point of view from the One to the Other, *de l'Un à l'Autre*, but also giving the Other sex the value of what secures the indetermination of nature. There were, indeed, many accounts of feminine sexuality, concurrent and alternative to Freud's that did not present the little girl as castrated. Yet what Lacan's hypothesis implies is that this is not the point. Consistent with the logic of supplementation, Lacan does not see the role of psychoanalysis as 'making up for' Freud's incomplete, one-sided, accounts of feminine sexuality. Any account of sexuality, insofar as it belongs to the realm of appearances, will inevitably be incomplete. A supposed theory of feminine sexuality would, in turn, leave out an account of homosexual sexuality, transvestite sexuality, and so on. As non-all, Lacan's concept of woman would perhaps be able to host the indefinite plurality of gender positions that deconstruction brought to the light in a way that modifies the sense of the man/woman binary. That is, to make of this structural incompleteness, the 'room for thought' that Kant made of his noumenon, so that another logic can come to supplement it, producing much more than what could be expected from a more complete account of human sexuality ('more complete' since completeness, as Kant taught us, cannot be asked from the phenomenal world), namely a subversion of the question itself. Are we talking about sexual characteristics or are we talking about regimes of oppression or privilege that make these contingent characteristics their cause? The legal discourse forced to modify its conception of marriage and parenthood in ethical and ever more inclusive ways is also an aspect of this subversion. It is because the feminine side regards the ethical that it is in contact with the noumenon in a positive sense as a field of possibility, while the masculine, being merely speculative must only regard the noumenon negatively, as what cannot be accessed, thus producing a non-rapport : 'Jouissance, insofar as it is sexual, is phallic, which means that it has no relation to the Other as such'.³⁰

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³⁰ Lacan, p. 8 [14].

If sexuality is relegated to the side of phallic jouissance, the logic of this Other jouissance is asexual: ‘When one loves, it is not about sex,’ says Lacan.³¹ The consequence of this move is that ‘sexual’ will come to designate the empirical, the secondary traits, the sexual organ as signifying the body deprived of its possibility of transcendence: ‘Phallic jouissance is the obstacle owing to which man does not come, I would say, to enjoy woman’s body, precisely because what he enjoys is the jouissance of the organ’.³² While asexual should not be understood as not being physical but in the sense that the body that is loved is not loved as a sexed body, but as a souled body:

Assuredly, what appears on bodies in the enigmatic forms of sexual characteristics—which are merely secondary— makes the sexed being (*l’être sexué*). No doubt. But being is the jouissance of the body as such, that is, as asexual (*asexué*), because what is known as sexual jouissance is marked and dominated by the impossibility of establishing as such, anywhere in the enunciable, the only One that interests us, the One of the relation “sexual relationship” (*rapport sexuel*).³³

What prompts the passage from the discourse of sexuality to the discourse of the body is the supplement of love. Yet the condition of possibility of this passage is an initial subtraction: a denial, an *aufhebung* of knowledge. It supposes a degree zero, a suspension of disbelief, a question, onto which, as Lacan says, love can attach itself: ‘The displacement of the negation from the “stops not being written”, to the “doesn’t stop being written,” in other words, from contingency to necessity—there lies the point of suspension to which all love is attached’.³⁴

A speculative intervention: ‘Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason’

Joan Copjec’s 1994 ‘Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason’ challenged the deconstructive position on sexual difference of Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990).³⁵ In order to refute the voluntarism that Butler’s argument about the performativity and historicity of gender was said to imply, Copjec resorted to Kant and Lacan.

³¹ Lacan, p. 25 [27].

³² *Ibid.*, p. 7 [13].

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 6–7 [13].

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 145 [132].

³⁵ Joan Copjec, ‘Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason’ in *Read My Desire*, Boston: MIT Press, 1994, pp. 201–236.

By making explicit a supposed implicit homology between Lacan's formulas of sexuation and Kant's antinomy of pure reason, Copjec argued that sex was the natural limit of reason and discourse. Thus, the sexual difference between man and woman was, in her reading, grounded in the very structure of reason. Just as Kant had shown, by dividing the four conflicts in the antinomy into a mathematical and a dynamical class, that reason fails in two possible ways, so does language, said Copjec, fail in two possible ways giving the two positions in discourse that Lacan identified as man's and woman's. Copjec mapped Lacan's formulas onto the Kantian antinomy so that woman's 'not-all' corresponded to the mathematical side; and man's 'all with an exclusion', to the dynamical side. While Kant's solution of the mathematical antinomy is that the disjunction either/or actually means neither/nor, the dynamical antinomy is solved by making a disjunction into a conjunction, a both/and. Thus, whereas the first solution, as Kant said of speculative philosophy, doesn't leave us with 'anything at all', the second has a crucial practical application which is the possibility of freedom. What Copjec's argument meant in the context of the first *Critique*, then, is that woman was aligned with the homogeneous kingdom of phenomena, and man with the side that allows heterogeneity — thus, not only the causality from nature but also the causality from freedom.³⁶

At the same time, Copjec's main objection to the deconstructive position was that it made 'freedom, "agency",' inconceivable.³⁷ Thus, according to this alignment, she placed deconstruction on the 'female side of the formulas' and her own discursive position on the masculine side. Of course there should be no problem with this, at least according to Lacan's own voluntarism, if Copjec did not think that she was doing the opposite. Copjec's essay ends with the exhortation to 'devote some thought to developing an ethics of inclusion or of the unlimited, that is, an ethics proper to the woman', meaning that this ethics would be one derived from the mathematical side of the antinomy or the speculative point of view. However, this is the side of the illusion that, remaining closer the 'thesis' side in each conflict, 'leads reason into the temptation ... to surrender itself to

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³⁶ Ewa Plonowska Ziarek makes a similar objection in 'From Euthanasia to the Other of Reason; Performativity and the Deconstruction of Sexual Difference' in *Derrida and Feminism; Recasting the Question of Woman*, ed. by Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson and Emily Zakin, New York and London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 115–140, (p. 122).

³⁷ Copjec, p. 212.

skeptical hopelessness' or to the 'euthanasia of pure reason'.³⁸ To resolve this contradiction, I have suggested to reverse the correspondence so that the signifier woman is on the side of the antinomy that allows the passage from speculative to practical reason.

Now, turning to the antinomy, Kant claims that a natural inclination of reason is to go from the conditioned to its condition in a regress through a series of subordinated terms towards the unconditioned. Reason demands, thus, 'the whole sum of conditions' for any given. When this demand is made of ideas which have no corresponding object in experience, namely psychological or theological, this does not represent a problem for, at this level of abstraction, anything can be postulated as a possibility as long as it is not self-contradictory. However, as soon as this demand is made of objects of possible experience, namely questions concerning the world, reason inevitably runs into contradictions for the demand of a 'whole sum' makes this immanent object (the world) extend beyond the limits of experience and thus become transcendent (a whole). Thus each time one asks whether the world has a beginning in time and space or is infinite, can be eternally divided or is simple, allows for free causes or whether everything in it is determined according to natural necessity, or whether it is the consequence of a necessary being or mere contingency, both pairs of dialectically opposed propositions can always (by proving the opposite false) be proven correct, leaving reason in an impasse.

The version of the solution to this impasse that Kant gives in the *Prolegomena* is the following:

In the first (the mathematical) class of antinomies the falsehood of the presupposition consists in representing in one concept something self-contradictory as if it were compatible (i.e., an appearance as an object in itself). But as to the second (the dynamical) class of antinomies, the falsehood of the presupposition consists in representing as contradictory what is compatible. Consequently, whereas in the first case the opposed assertions were both false, in this case [the dynamical],

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³⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A407/B434, p. 460.

on the other hand, where they are opposed to one another by mere misunderstanding, they may both be true.³⁹

From this, Copjec goes on to argue that the mathematical antinomies correspond to Lacan's female side of the formulas of sexualisation, while the dynamical, namely that there might be not only natural necessity but also freedom, corresponds to the male side of the formulas.

Now, returning to Copjec's final exhortation for 'an ethics of inclusion and the unlimited', both 'inclusion' and 'unlimited' remind us of the structure of the 'non-all' that woman, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, shares with the unconscious. These terms also seem to allude to the structure of the infinite judgement, which, limiting a sphere of possibility only internally, allows its outer bounds to remain indeterminate. In fact, we have so far argued that Kant's ethics and the 'ethics of psychoanalysis' are precisely ethics of the unlimited, in this sense. However, we see that the unlimited that Copjec believes to be 'proper to the woman' is one limited to the realm of experience. An ethics of inclusion and the unlimited requires the solution to the dynamical antinomy concerning causality in the world. This solution consists in accepting both the causality according to nature and the possibility that there is a causality from freedom. Accepting both requires a leap of faith that was not necessary in the prudent solution of the mathematical antinomy regarding extension, which consisted in denying both possible solutions to the problem of whether the world is finite or infinite. When passing onto the dynamical class of conflicts where the infinite has a place, 'it is no longer from the perspective of extension that we must take up the non-all (*pastoute*)'.⁴⁰

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This is significant insofar as the solution to the dynamical antinomy is the one that belongs to practical reason, and the one that authorises Kant to postulate his ethics on the basis of freedom. That is, the dynamical antinomy is the degree zero, the hinging point of the entire first *Critique*, insofar as it is what, for

³⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to any future metaphysics that will be able to come forward as science*, trans. by Paul Carus and James W. Ellington, Cambridge/Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977; repr. 2001, p. 78.

⁴⁰ Lacan, p. 103 [94]. Although Lacan is not here referring specifically to Kant's notion of extension or the mathematical, he will also say 'the analytic thing will not be mathematical. This is why the discourse of analysis differs from scientific discourse'. p. 117 [105].

Kant, satisfies both speculative reason, analytically, and practical reason. The solution to this antinomy becomes the keystone of the second *Critique*: its theoretical ground. Time and again, Kant reformulates this solution in the *Critique of Practical Reason* as a proof of freedom:

The determination of the causality of beings in the sensible world can as such never be unconditioned, and yet for every series of conditions there must necessarily be something unconditioned and so too a causality that is altogether self-determining. Hence the idea of freedom as a faculty of absolute spontaneity was not a need but, as far as its possibility is concerned, an analytic principle of pure speculative reason.⁴¹

While the solution to the mathematical antinomy only satisfies the understanding and speculative reason, the satisfaction that the solution to the dynamical antinomy gives is dual. Kant says: ‘The thoroughly conditioned character of what is in the dynamical series..., which is inseparable from them as appearances, is connected with a condition that is empirically unconditioned, but also nonsensible, which gives satisfaction to the understanding on one side and to reason on the other.’⁴² This remark concerning the place of the dynamical antinomy with respect to the wider context of the *Critique* is what prompts me to invert Copjec’s alignment.

In our reading of the first *Critique* together with *Encore*, the dynamical antinomy becomes that ‘point of suspension’ to which the possibility of freedom for ethics is attached. Here, the displacement goes from a ‘neither/nor’ of the mathematical antinomy to a ‘not only but also’ of the dynamical; an antinomy that ‘doesn’t stop being written’ (*ne cesse pas de s’écrire*) within Kantian moral or practical philosophy. Furthermore, insofar as speculative reason cannot deny the possibility of freedom, Kant sees the latter also as ‘an analytic principle of pure speculative reason’.⁴³ It is in this ‘analytic principle’ that freedom touches speculative reason, that is, in a sort of tautology. The cause from freedom (not itself conditioned) satisfies the understanding merely by being nonsensible, that is, outside the field of its concern which is limited to the possible objects of

⁴¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, in: *Practical Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor, 5:48, p. 178.

⁴² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A532/B560, p. 532. Original emphasis.

⁴³ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:48, p. 178.

experience. The minimal demand of reason for Kant, consists in that one do not contradict oneself. Once this is the case, one is free to think whatever one likes. Reason, however, is harder to satisfy.

I argue that feminine *jouissance* can be thought of as the *jouissance* of reason, allowed not by the solution to the mathematical antinomies but by the solution to the dynamical antinomies. The attack on ‘common sense’ that Copjec takes the statement ‘the woman does not exist’ to be is, in Kant, on the dynamical side. When he presents the distinction between classes of antinomies in the *Critique*, as a ‘concluding remark’, he makes it clear that whereas in the mathematical class the conflict rests on ‘the usual presupposition of common human understanding’, namely that all members of a series of conditions have to be of the ‘same kind’, it is the dynamical class of concepts that ‘opens up for us an entirely new prospect in regard to the suit in which reason has become implicated’ which is reason’s proper use.⁴⁴ Mathematical synthesis, says Kant, is enough as long we ‘stay within appearance’, but if we want to satisfy not only the understanding but also reason (a higher faculty) we necessarily need to progress towards the dynamical. Later on, he will attach to the philosopher obstinate to remain within the first, concerning himself only with magnitude and not freedom, the pejorative connotations of the sophist or the philosopher concerned only with the speculative use of reason, which, as Kant states in the second *Critique*, should always be subordinated to the practical use of reason — the construction of a moral world. Thus, if the political subjectivity of woman is to be constructed, it will have to be not through the mathematical but through the dynamical antinomy.

50 In proceeding with this critique, I did not engage directly with the way Copjec formulates the parallel structure of the formulas. Instead, I would like to emphasize the necessity to perform a sort of ‘transcendental reflection’ when it comes to Lacan’s formalism. That is, to go always from formal logic to transcendental logic, which takes on account the content of the propositions. Lacan’s own emphasis in the master’s gesture of ‘explication’ that his formulas render necessary seems to me to be equivalent to Kant’s critique of formal logic. Formulas, as Lacan liked to repeat, never speak for themselves; they are always in relationship to a supplementary motion of ‘filling in’ directed by desire or a cause. Whatever signifier is engaged in the cause of freedom is necessarily on

⁴⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A530/B558, p. 531.

the side of the dynamical and not the mathematical antinomy. Whether this signifier is 'woman', 'man' or another, however, is historically contingent. Perhaps to follow the itinerary that *Encore* traces is to move from the contingency of this signifier to the necessity of freedom.⁴⁵

If feminism has something to gain from Lacan's (critique of the) metaphysics of sexual difference, then it would be essential to reclaim the dynamical antinomy for the signifier woman. Although both sides serve the same interest of reason (which is practical), the dynamical side is the one that allows the shift of reason. Copjec claimed that Kant privileged the mathematical antinomy because of the order in which it appears: preceding the dynamical. However, the *Critique* progresses towards higher and higher concepts so that the latter terms have primacy over earlier ones, just as practical reason has primacy over speculative reason. Inverting this privilege aligns Copjec to Adorno who asserted the primacy of theory.⁴⁶

One of the unwanted consequences of Copjec's essay is to produce an ontology of sexual difference, which for her can be finally 'fixed' in the Real if thought negatively as a failure or a limit. Sex, says Copjec, 'does not budge'.⁴⁷ Kant himself, however, never claimed any limit as secure terrain; thus the necessity of a critique. The limitlessness of biology and its technical manipulation, together with the limitlessness of cultural invention, make of sex precisely what budes endlessly. Our task, as the current debates on bioethics and new family configurations remind us daily, is to reinvent the limits within an ethical horizon. Having no problem to move from the level of the signifier to the level of existence, (which is what supposedly deconstruction does wrong) Copjec goes as far as to imply that Lacan's theory explains why women have never been 'all' enlisted in a feminist project. This, she says, is because women simply cannot constitute an all. Kant's legacy to feminism or any politically progressive project is precisely the opposite, namely, the *Critique* makes room for the assertion that 'perhaps everything that has happened in the course of nature ought not to have hap-

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⁴⁵ However, as I have shown elsewhere, Kant's formulation of the dynamical law of nature, which rests on that the human being's power of choice has both an empirical and an intelligible character, closely resembles the woman's side of the formulas of sexualization. See Espinoza, pp. 64–65.

⁴⁶ Copjec, p. 236.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

pened', so that reason's ability to invent an idea of the good that could become the ground that determines experience should never have to bow to what seems to be the lesson of the empirical world.⁴⁸ 'All' life and the 'whole' world should remain the regulative horizon of feminism, just as it is that of Kantian cosmopolitanism. That conflict will not be done away with in the construction of this 'all' is what distinguishes these projects from totalitarian ones.

In 1976, a young Argentine psychoanalyst studying in Paris went to visit Lacan. Silvia Fendrik told him, with the 'charming arrogance of a twenty-nine year-old', that she had written a paper on feminine sexuality and asked if he could recommend new literature on the subject.⁴⁹ Lacan then called Gloria Gonzalez-Yerodia, his secretary, and asked her to fetch a book for his guest. To her surprise, it was Mary Jane Sherfey's *The Nature and Evolution of Female Sexuality* (1972), a reprint of the 1966 JAPA article. Fendrik, a little offended, told him that she had hoped he would give her something written by him and not by someone in the American school. Lacan replied that this was a book that she could not omit to read if she was interested in feminine sexuality, and that 'one has to read and study a lot of everything, not only the few things that Lacan said or could say'.⁵⁰ The anecdote could be interpreted in the most and least charitable of manners. I believe that Lacan was honest in his appraisal. Sherfey's article begins with the passage from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in which Freud speaks of the 'unlimited possibilities of biology', which may 'blow away the whole of our [psychoanalysis'] artificial structure of hypotheses'.⁵¹ However, she concluded that this structure, minus the theory of feminine sexuality, remained relevant because of its emphasis on the complexity of psychic phenomena's interweaving with cultural and biological factors.

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Sherfey's contributions were quickly dismissed by the scientific establishment. The hypothesis of a theoretical insatiability of the feminine sexual drive and the cultural consequences that she derives from it, however, do not belong to science. They constitute primarily a political gesture, posing a primordial exces-

⁴⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A551/B579, p. 542.

⁴⁹ The article was 'La sexualidad femenina en el discurso analítico: universalidad o histeria?' in *Imago: Revista de psicoanálisis, psiquiatría y psicología*, 4 (7/1976).

⁵⁰ Silvia Fendrik, 'Aun Mas', <http://www.psicomundo.com/foros/egp/aunmas.htm> accessed on 10/09/201. My translation.

⁵¹ Cited in Sherfey, p. 28.

siveness to limitation: ‘the strength of the drive determines the force required to suppress it’, says Sherfey.⁵² Both Kant and Freud had posed similar ambivalent forces at once threatening civilization and securing the irreducibility of man to coercion. Sherfey attributes this force and danger to the oppressed group, in this case women, providing an alternative explanation for patriarchy that avoids the paradigm of masochism and sadism, and thus the messy economy of jouissance that lies in victimhood. Woman’s biological insatiability could very well stand for the insatiability of desire or of reason. It inevitably leads to an antinomy. In a mythical past of higher primates and matriarchies, the form of this antinomy was, according to Sherfey, ‘the paradoxical state of sexual insatiation in the presence of the utmost sexual satiation’⁵³: a state of dissatisfaction that I have placed on the mathematical side of the antinomy concerning extension. The ‘evolution of modern man’ implied a passage to the dynamical side of the antinomy, and yet, thousands of years of partial patriarchal suppression, showing the ambivalence and danger of the cornerstone of the critical edifice. In her conclusion, Sherfey reflects upon the possible consequences of the recent lifting of this suppression achieved by the scientific revolution, the social struggles for equality and the new ‘emotional honesty’ sweeping across the world and largely inspired by psychoanalysis.⁵⁴ She predicts either a return to even stronger suppression or the disappearance of the biological family, in which case ‘what other patterns of infant care and adult relationships could adequately substitute cannot now be imagined’.⁵⁵ Half a century later, the world is polarised between the stronger suppression and a decided attempt to imagine these patterns. The task of an ethics of sexual difference is to reinvent the limit otherwise than in patriarchy, in a way that, as transcendental reflection, leaves the beyond phenomena for the singular, autonomous, amorous and poetical exercise of reason.

⁵² Sherfey, p. 121.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*