Marie-Hélène Brousse Feminism With Lacan

The "Dark Continent" of feminine sexuality has been a commonplace idea in psychoanalysis since Freud. It is no secret. On the contrary, it is an oft-repeated proposition that as far as psychoanalysis is concerned, femininity remains enigmatic. Nevertheless, it is through women, namely his hysterical patients, that Freud discovered the unconscious in relation to his own self-analysis.

On the other hand, it is also well known that feminism has often considered Freud an adversary, holding against him, not so much his declaration of ignorance regarding women, but precisely what he knew and asserted. The controversy over what woman is or wants divided the Freudian Field itself. At the end of the 'twenties and 'thirties, debates occurred between psychoanalysts, among them Ernest Jones, Helena Deutsch and Karen Horney, who contributed to the articulation of feminist positions and concerns in psychoanalysis, without, however, changing the main post-Freudian orientation.

But what precisely are the points of the conflict? These include: 1) the part played by the castration complex in the Oedipus complex, and 2) the predominance of the phallus.

These two Freudian issues have been simultaneously the source of constant misunderstandings (caused by Freud's lack of precision regarding them), and, paradoxically, the source of confrontations that Freud's rigor and sound orientation made possible. These two affirmations--"the libido is phallic"; and "there is no access to a subjective position except by passing through the castration complex, which is different for girls and boys"--have given rise to many different interpretations. Indeed, one often barely recognises them. It is precisely these issues on which Lacan's return to Freud will center for a certain period of his teaching when he is strictly

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Freudian. But to be Freudian after Freud, requires that one find solutions where Freud encountered problems and contradictions.

I. Lacan's Answers to Freud's Difficulties

But what answers does Lacan bring to Freud's difficulties? First, one must know that Freud's orientation had brought him to two impasses:

(1) the biological impasse which he deals with in the 1925 text, "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Differences Between the Sexes," where he considers how logically to situate the penis as an organ and how logically to situate the clitoris and the vagina with reference to the phallus;¹ (2) an impasse one might call the mother as stumbling-block. In his 1931 text "On Feminine Sexuality," Freud says that one comes up against the underestimation of the daughter's link with the mother in psychoanalysis.² He shows us that it is necessary to rethink the "Oedipus" of the girl. But there are major differences between Freudian stumblings and those of post-Freudians. I shall not deal with those, however, first because Lacan's whole effort aimed at finding a new way in psychoanalysis, far away from the conformity of ego psychoanalytic thinking. Second, post-Freudian solutions often consist in a mere assimilation of the idea of the phallus to the penis, with the intent of showing sexual differences as symmetrical.

But how does one get out of Freud's impasses, impasses formulated as fear of the castration complex and as penis envy right up to one of his last texts on psychoanalysis? One answer lies in emphasizing that the phallus is a *signifier*. In the *Ecrits* Lacan points out that Freud failed to understand "*the heteroclitic nature* of the castration complex" because he aimed at understanding different processes by means of the same functions.³ Lacan proceeds, rather, to distinguish these functions by means of the three registers: the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real.

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Φ Symbol of a <i>sacrifice</i> of jouissance	$-\varphi$ Image of the penis but as <i>negativized</i> in its <i>place</i> in the specular image. Negativisation produces a place: image of a <i>loss</i> .		φ Organ image: gives body to autoerotic jouissance.
Symbolic function impossible to negativise for a speaking being. ($\varphi_{x:}$ dead father)	Imaginary fun masks the and principle of sacrifice	ction gives to the process its instrument	Privation: <i>real</i> lack of a signifier
Symbolic castration	Imaginary castr	ation	Real lack

Conclusions to this clarification

First, the biological organ as such, that is to say, as real, never lacks. In a biological sense, a woman or a girl does not lack any organ. On the contrary, she may think she has too much. Marie Bonaparte, for example, thought her clitoris was too much.⁴ Second, this example shows that we are never dealing directly with the sex of an organ because even before we were born as biological individuals, we were already located in the language field. We are dealing with *images* of completeness or of lack, then, and with *signifiers*. Thus, there is no possibility of approaching sexuality without distinguishing the organ as an image, which is the negativisation of the organ, from the image as a signifier, which results from the transformation of this lack and empty place into a symbolic sacrifice.

This formalisation of function in terms of I, R, S, allows a new approach to the Oedipus complex and to the subject of the unconscious. It permits one to break away from the Oedipus complex as a myth, in favor of a logification of sexual difference which Lacan will achieve in $Encore^5$ But even after this first clarification of what the phallus is in psychoanalysis--and it is the center of psychoanalysis--we still come up against two difficulties:

(1) This concept of the phallus does not, in itself, allow one to think clearly about the difference between man and woman. Indeed, on the contrary, the subject of the unconscious is unisexuated, or phallocentered, which is the same thing. We only deal with sexuality in general for *parlêtres* (speaking beings). Using the phallus as unique operator, Freud intended to formulate the difference between masculine and feminine sexuality as:

Fear of castration (horror and disgust vis-à-vis woman) *Penisneid* ("penis envy") (vindications and hatred).

After this clarification, but still having only this unique operator--the phallus--Lacan proposes a new formulation of the difference between the sexes. More precisely, he proposes a distinction between the masculine and the feminine positions in regards to the phallus. But instead of fear and envy, he used two terms: to have and to be. In the masculine position one has it without being it. To have the phallus is possible on the condition that one renounces being it; namely, if one considers it to be the mother's. In the feminine position, one accepts being it, without having it. For both sexes, then, the phallus provokes a loss and a choice. Sexual position is the result of that loss which is a sacrifice of *jouissance*.

This is related to the two main structures: obsession as a question concerning "being" and hysteria as centered on the infinite figures of loss. This is already an answer to the question of sexual difference calculable by a small combinative (*combinatoire*).

(2) The second difficulty that remains concerns the mother. The unique phallic reference for the subject of the unconscious also has consequences for the issue of the mother. We know that Lacan's orientation does not take the relation mother-child as a possible archetype of a sexual relationship. We also know that the main orientation of psychoanalysis since Freud focuses on the mother-child relation. Such post-Freudians believe that a sexual relation existed once and that it is written: Mother/Relation/Child. Lacan was well aware of the necessity that brings them to that erroneous conclusion: "Psychoanalytical discourses demonstrate" that "as a signifier, woman can only be taken *quoad matrem*. Woman only assumes her function in the sexual relation as mother" (*Encore*, p. 36). Lacan says this again in *Television*: "The familial order is nothing but the translation of the fact that the father is not the progenitor and that the mother remains the contaminator of woman for man's offspring".⁶

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For that reason, if a relation can be written, it is the relation between mother and father which is still not the sexual relation. Lacan wrote this relation as the paternal metaphor:

<u>NP</u> <u>Father's Name</u> DM Mother's desire

In the unconscious there is a relation between the father and mother (the primitive or primal scene) and it is precisely this *relation* which produces both castration and the phallic process of signification. Moreover, it is only because she is forbidden that the mother can appear as object of desire, in the unconscious.

What remains unsolved, however, is how to write the difference between the sexes. Lacan will answer that question in his own way

II. Lacan's Answers to His Own Questions:

To produce such an answer, Lacan had to transform what seemed to be obstacles, that is to say the impossible, into given premises, as points of the Real.

If Woman does not assume her function in the sexual relation except as mother, then woman does not exist.

If man has being only as a signifier and operates his function only *quoad castrationem*, we cannot write the sexual relation except to take it as the Mother-Father relation. Then there is no sexual relation. This does not mean that there are not sexual acts. But it is this confusion which makes the sexual act misfire.

Lacan, in his Seminar *Encore*, relates the indignation and anger produced by a lecture he gave in Milan (Italy) in the 'seventies under the title "Psychoanalysis in its Reference to the Sexual Relation". They even wrote in the *Corriere della Sera* (Evening Newspaper): "For Doctor Lacan, women do not exist." How clever they are, he adds. This formula "La Femme n'existe pas"/"[The] Woman does not exist" contributed to reinforcing the reputation of psychoanalysis as being "misogynistic" at the end of the 'sixties. We assert, however, that it gave psychoanalysis the logical solution to the problem of human sexuality which it had been seeking since Freud. I propose that we work on this formula: "[The] Woman does not exist". First I will put it back in context. Secondly, I shall explain it. Thirdly, I shall consider some of its consequences.

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I. The context of this formula is psychoanalysis as a clinical approach to the subject. Since Freud constructs psychoanalysis as an "apparatus" (*dispositif*) of speech, sexuality appeared as an immense misunderstanding within it. Yet, each treatment gives proof that there is no such thing as an instinctive, natural sexual relationship between man and woman. The fact that they are biologically determined is of no help to them, to the point that sometimes the biological sex appears as the supreme obstacle to assuming a subjective sexual position. The Freudian apparatus, as it arises from the treatment of hysteria, emphasizes, for example, the hysterical question which is a question about sex: What s a woman? Today, each treatment of any particular hysterically structured subject points to this question, nearly a hundred years after the invention of psychoanalysis.

This difficulty of the relation between the sexes is transhistorical, transcultural, and transstructural. That is to say, it is by no means specific to the Freudian Field. But the Freudian approach has been the only one to try to theorize it, rejecting the religious or moral issues, as well as considering the responses of the biological sciences as irrelevant to any question a speaking being asks about sex. To give specificity to the psychoanalytical approach to sexuality, we have to keep in mind this distinction between organism, body and subject, a distinction which can be related to the three dimensions Lacan invented: Real, Imaginary and Symbolic.



There is no such thing as the correspondence or mutual covering of these three concepts: in consequence, subjective sex is not the psychical transcription of the biological sex, nor of the body image.

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The cut produced by the Symbolic, that is to say by the Other (A) in terms of signifiers $S_1 - S_2$, generates effects of separation, exclusion, and loss, as well as effects of veiling, enveloping, that is to say of "*semblant*" (semblance). As a counterexample, we could evoke the case of ani-mals as studied by ethology: in that case, there is no such thing as the Symbolic dimension (no such thing as language thought of in terms of the distinction between a signifier and a signified).

Lacan's reference at the end of *Encore* to an elementary topology defines the Borromean knot as a wedging created by the crossing of two continuities, which stops a third one. If we have only two continuities or only two dimensions (in the case of animals, organism and body image), they can cover themselves, as if superimposed one on the other. And as for sexuality in the animal world, the species requirements regulate the individual behaviors in a perfectly adequate way. While the instinctual knowledge of animals allows adequation, what characterizes the unconscious as knowledge is its inadequation. This is very simply written by Lacan's sense of de Saussure's algorithm $\frac{S}{s}$. What one must emphasize here is the bar, with which we can write the subject as such: S

I am now going to develop the second point concerning the context of this formula: "La Femme n'existe pas"/"Woman does not exist". I have, in fact, already started to do it. While Freud emphasized that psychoanalysis is a clinical approach to sexuality in human beings as subjects of the unconscious, Lacan, in his steady desire to forge a clarification and formalization of psychoanalysis, passes from a mythical approach to the Oedipus complex, to a logical conceptualization of castration. First, you realize that the distinction between the individual organism, the body image, and the unconscious subject demands that one differentiate biological sex from sexual image and sexual signifiers, a distinction that the mere terms "man" and "woman" cannot by any means allow. By considering sex as a consequence of the Oedipus complex in his article "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Difference Between the Sexes," Freud had opened the way for the Oedipus to be considered as an apparatus for producing two sexes from the primary position where there is only one. And the apparatus operates by the distinction between identification and object choice.

Thus, the Oedipus complex can be considered as a machine producing four possibilities: masculine or feminine identification and masculine or feminine object choice, thus giving four possible subjective positions. Though its intent to formalize lies on the

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unquestioned *équivoque* of man and woman, with sexuality corresponding to male and female as given sexes, this Freudian approach implies the definition of the object as a totality This can be explained by the fact that Freud started from the Oedipus myth; that is to say, not from the relationship between man and woman, but the relation between the paternal function and the mother's desire. If you start from what we can write as F/M, knowing that the consequence of this relation is *X*1--that is to say the incest prohibition--you certainly obtain the formulae for sexual organizations I mentioned, but you build the whole of women on the model of the mother; that is to say, in reference to phallic signification. We know to what degree this process is confirmed by clinical material. It can even be summed up by the familiar expression: "They are all whores, except my mother."

By considering sexuality in the subject as a sexuation process, Lacan allows psychoanalysis to go a step further, resituating the mechanism of the Oedipus complex within the framework given by the use of formal logic. Psychoanalysis deals with speaking beings (*parlêtres*); this is the specificity of the unconscious subject as defined by the structure of speech and the field of language. For Lacan, knowledge about the sexes relies on this paradox in which the distinction between man and Woman is to be situated. "Man" means both male and human at the same time; that is to say, language determined. All this leads to the conclusion that there is no symmetry between man and woman. Lacan's demonstration of this point starts from this set: (1) speaking beings, used as another term for subject (2) the use of a few logical operators: \exists , \forall and negation 3) and castration considered as the function Φ , that is to say, the sacrifice of *jouissance* Principle.

II. The formula: "Woman does not exist". The logic of sexuation produces two sets of speaking beings that are not complementary and opposed, but supplementary and composed (i.e. const-ituted).

One of the two sets implies the universality of the Φ function. Any subject is submitted to castration by the exigencies of language and speech. This universality is linked to a principle of exception:

 $\exists_x \ \overline{\Phi x} \cong$ Father as Dead $(\underline{\text{Totem}} \text{ and } \underline{\text{Taboo}})^7$

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There is one who is not submitted to castration as expressed in an existential judgment. This unique exception allows us to define the set of the others as a whole. On the left side of the blackboard there is a link between \exists and \forall , existence and universality. Man can be defined by the universality of the castration function. This, of course, implies that, for man, there is no access to his sexual father except by saying no to a pure phallic satisfaction (namely masturba-

tion). Indeed, organ *jouissance* can possibly oppose itself to sexual satisfaction. The access to sex has to pass through language and speech. That is to say, there is no direct access to woman as a figure of the Other sex. This access depends on that sacrifice of *jouissance* and its consequence: the object taken as partial, that is to say constituted from the loss introduced by the phallic function and imaginarily invested. Access to sexuality as such is given by this imaginarized object, which implies that in the sexual relation the other as Real is a failure: fantasy comes to its place.



On the other side of the blackboard Lacan writes the formula determining the so-called feminine sexual position. He writes the letters by means of an unusual use of negation on the two logical operators.

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Lacan remarks that "not all" is different from "not at all" which emphasizes that the consequence of this unusual use of negation in logic is the impossibility of building a limited and strictly defined set, or the impossibility of any universal affirmation in this set. The relation between man's *jouissance* and Woman's is not a complementary one nor one of opposition. To use Lacan's

terms, it is a relation of supplementarity. On the feminine part of the board, two arrows point to the signifier for phallic *jouissance* and, in addition, to the Other *jouissance*, as not exclusive. Lacan speaks of) \mathcal{W} oman's *jouissance* as not completely covered by man's. The negation of the universality of quantification, as Written by Lacan-*La* (\mathcal{W} oman)--can be considered as a negative or empty center which orders clinical substitutes around this bar.

If we consider Lacan's letters, we will orient ourselves by the two arrows he uses to write the splitting of the feminine position: one is directed towards the phallic function, the other towards the lack of a signifier in the Other; that is to say, the paradox of the Symbolic as being without any paternal guarantee.

In psychoanalysis, femininity is another name for the Other, the Other's sex, which no signifier can designate. Under those conditions, and if confronted with the impossibility of writing the sexual relation, one must ask if this Other sex is unreachable? It is reachable, but by a series of detours which are ways of surrounding it, and therefore, missing it. The clinic provides the formulation of

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these detours. What are they? What are the ways for speaking beings, for subjects, to tend to the Otherness of sex?

I shall oppose two registers: the register of love (the erotomaniac form of love) and the register of desire (the fetishist form). In each of those I will locate two solutions.

III. The Consequences of Woman Does Not Ex-sist

A. Detours via fantasy; that is to say, by desire as sustained by fantasy

1. Masquerade

This is a phallocentric manifestation which implies WOMAN as the absolute Other: the Other of the Other. It is situated on the masculine side of the sexuation tables, and implies the detour by man for whom this Absolute Other masks the lack in the Other. This lack of a signifier is veiled here by means of the object as partial. This masculine way, this approach to Woman, by fantasy, leads to fetishism. It is in this sense that Lacan says in *Television*: "If man wants Woman, he cannot reach her without finding himself run aground on the field of perversion" (p. 42). What does Lacan mean here by perversion? Perhaps we can clarify it by another of Lacan's texts, "Subversion of the Subject, . . . " where he writes: "Perversion accentuates to some extent the function of desire in man, insofar as he sets Up ifs dominance in the privileged place of *jouissance* of the object *a* substituted for A (*Ecrits*, p. 320). Let us recognize "fetishism" as the major form of perversion and remember the text of Freud on fetishism where he precisely emphasizes fetishism as a masculine trait.

But this detour of fantasy, which pretends to reach the Other as Absolute and falls on the object as partial, is used by Woman too. In the text "Guiding Remarks for a Congress on Feminine Sexuality" Lacan writes that woman can use "man so as to transform herself into this Other for herself as she is this Other for him."⁵ This implies "that images and symbols for woman are just the images and symbols of woman." They are not her own, belonging, as part of the Symbolic, to the phallic dialectic.

What, in that case, is the feminine solution? Lacan used the word *masquerade* three times: in the text "For the Preparation of a Congress on Feminine Sexuality," in *Television* and in the Seminar

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L'Envers de la psychanalyse.⁹ We know "masquerade" is a term taken from a famous article by Joan Rivière "Womanliness as Masquerade" where, using a Kleinian interpretation concerning a case of hysteria, nevertheless, Rivière achieves a radicalisation of her thesis: femininity manifests itself in a masquerade, but behind the phallic mask, we do not find any truth about femininity.¹⁰ Femininity is nothing but the mask itself, or the mask itself is the truth of femininity as a phallic emblem. This posits femininity as one of the figures of fetishism. But Lacan goes further in *Television* where, speaking of masquerade, he points out a way for a feminine solution: "Precisely why they are not-all--that is to say not-at-all-mad-about-the-whole (*folles-du-tout*); accommodating rather: to the point where there is no limit to the concessions made by any woman for *a* man, of her body, her soul, her possessions. Powerless with respect to her fantasies which are less easy to control" (p. 40).

Let us emphasize here: (1) the any [*chacune/each* one] woman; we are not in the field of the universal, but woman as taken one by one. (2) Why is she "powerless with respect to her fantasies?" I should say because fantasy again leads her to the masculine side of the tables in *Encore*. Lacan continues: This position "leads her into the familiar masquerade." That is to say, "she prepares herself on-the-off-chance [just in case], so that her inner fantasy of Man

[L'homme] will find its hour of truth" (p. 40). This is a way to say that she places herself as S in the position of the *a*; that is to say in the position of the object. In this conception, the masquerade is not a lie, but a "*semblant*," which can be defined as a fiction plus belief, implied by her being stuck to her own fantasy. By placing herself as a *semblant* of the object, she produces a fiction of femininity and reveals the truth of femininity as a masculine fantasy. But to achieve this implies the possibility of making what Lacan calls, "concessions" which could be defined as the admission of the Other as A.

2. Motherhood

Another phallic answer to the lack of a signifier for Woman in the unconscious is to be the mother of a child. Curiously enough, this solution locates a woman on the masculine side of the board. In *Television*, Lacan writes that in the unconscious "the mother remains the contaminator of woman for man's offspring" (p. 30). This contamination results from the castration complex. The mother, taken as another name for desire, is produced because of the incest Prohibition as a signifier. Thus Motherhood necessarily implies a phallic investment in the child, giving it a libidinal value, and

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therefore requiring a fantasy. The child is a phallicized object that can only be located by means of its appearances in fantasy. This particular detour of fantasy implies this circuit:



B. Detours by Love

Love has to do with the Real. Thus, these detours touch the Real by means of S (A).

1. Psychosis and Erotomania

In "For a Congress on Feminine Sexuality" Lacan opposes the erotomaniac form of love to the fetishistic form of love. And in *Television* he says: "Woman only encounters Man in psychosis" (p. 40). Let us assert that this particular encounter with Man as Universal (and not a man, any man) is a way to affirm, in return, Woman as *La Femme*, without the bar on the *La*.

Erotomania corresponds to the formula "he loves me" and allows a woman to place herself in the universal: "To be the Woman." If she is not a universal category, at least she thinks she is placed there as a unique case, as the exception: $\exists W$.

One can think of Schreber's formula--"To be the wife of God," and of another formula invented by Lacan, "Pousse à la femme,"--as efforts to incarnate the Woman that Man lacks as a whole as pertaining to all men.

In the case of erotomania the detour is effected by means of love: love guaranteed by the universal, that is to say in this field of the whole, without any limit. There are no limits to the *jouissance* of this whole. In erotomania, the absolute Other as woman exists, but only as long as the subject devotes himself or herself to the *jouissance* of that Other which, therefore, ceases to be prohibited.

2. Homosexual love

In homosexuality love is not at the disposal of Man, of the Other. It is that kind of courtly love described by Freud in the case of the young homosexual which implies, as in hysteria, an identification

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with man, but not with the impotence of his desire. It is a position "*hors sexe*," outside (beyond) sex, outside the law But this ideal love of an Ideal lady, that is to say love of the Other sex as such, fails by converting itself into a *jouissance* of the same; from the Other we fall into the same: Love for the Other \rightarrow *jouissance* of the same. From Otherness to Sameness is one of the adventures of feminism. By making an ideal out of Femininity, this path renounces desire.

The price one pays for the feminist solution--although there is phallic *jouissance* and sexual satisfaction on the one hand--on the other hand, there is the continual possibility, when desire arises, of disappearing in an identification with the object as a piece of trash (*déchet*). These detours correspond to different forms of clinical structures and are forms of positions taken in regard to A. They are clinically defined ways of giving an answer to the enigma of

femininity. In a sense we can say, with Lacan, and after Freud, that for a subject-effect of the Symbolic order and subject of the unconscious--any subjective position implies an answer to this point of the Real. Any subjective position cuts through the Symbolic that femininity, as the Impossible Other, figures.

For this reason, psychoanalysis produces another dimension (in the sense of a fourth dimension) in the field of culture which totally disrupts the usual points of reference concerning woman. And this is why it seems to me that psychoanalysis gives the truth of feminism. If we remember the definition Lacan gives of myth in *Television* as "an attempt to give an epic form to what is operative through structure," (p. 30) operative but impossible to write--that is to say S (A)--then feminism is a myth: one attempt among others to give the epic form of a sexual war and an Ideal otherness to that point of the Real in the Other--the (A)which cannot be caught by signifiers.

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Notes

1. Sigmund Freud, "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Differences Between the Sexes (1925)," SE 19: 243-258.

2. Sigmund Freud, "On Feminine Sexuality (1931)," SE 21: 323-243.

3. Jacques Lacan, "Subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the unconscious," in *Ecrits: A Selection* trans. and ed. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), p. 319.

4. Marie Bonaparte, in her literal-minded quest for vaginal orgasm, subjected herself to a number of surgical operations on her clitoral area, though without finally achieving the fantasized result. Cf. Serge André, "Marie Bonaparte 1882-1962 Ambassadrice de Freud," *Ornicar?* 46.3 (1988): 93-104, esp. p. 99.

5. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire* de Jacques Lacan, Livre XX (1972-1973): *Encore*, text established by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 14.

6. Jacques Lacan, *Television*, trans. by Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), p. 30.

7. Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo (1913), SE 13:1-162.

8. Jacques Lacan, "Guiding Remarks for a Congress on Feminine Sexuality" in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the* école freudienne, ed. by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. by Jacqueline Rose (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), p. 93.

9. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire* de Jacques Lacan, *Livre XVIII* (1960-1961): *L'envers de la psychanalyse* (1960-1961), text established by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1991).

10. Joan Rivière, "Womanliness as Masquerade," ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 10 (1929). Reprinted in *Formations of Fantasy* (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1986).

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In Memoriam

Rena Grant

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